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MR BACHELLER'S APARTMENTS

BY WILLIAM HAMILTON

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# Mr. Bacheller's Apartments

## A STORY OF DEEP MYSTERY

By WILLIAM HAMILTON OSBORNE, author of "The Red Mouse," "The Running Fight," etc.

### CHAPTER ONE

THE girl in the victoria leaned forward almost imperceptibly. "Peter!" she exclaimed in low, incisive tones.

The coachman did not move. He spoke, however, and the sound of his respectful voice reached her by traveling around his collar.

"Yes, miss," he replied.

"Stop at the next corner."

Peter started. The next corner was quite uncompromisingly in the midst of a decidedly undesirable neighborhood, known well enough to him, perhaps, but certainly unknown to his mistress. His back bristled with protest, but he gave no other sign.

"The corner 'ouse, miss?"

"No, not at the corner house, merely at the corner."

Peter argued to himself that the situation was unusual. The request certainly was without precedent. But what could he do?

"Yes, miss," he assented weakly, and obediently drew up his spirited pair at the indicated stopping-place.

As he did so, one or two denizens of the neighborhood, some of them clothed in rags and patches, stopped and stared. Perhaps a limousine-car, suggestive of the sport quite as much as of the millionaire, would not have occasioned the same degree of surprise, for the Ninth Ward was dotted with gambling-houses, restaurants of a certain character and other resorts, where the spending of money was a task made unusually easy.

But this turnout bespoke nothing save aristocracy; it fairly reeked with it, from the very tip of the noses of the slender, skittish bays to the slightly tilted hat of the young woman in the victoria. There was something, too, that separated this equipage even from the other equipages of aristocracy. The pair of bays wore no check-reins; pride alone curved their arched necks and held their heads well up in the air. They wore no blinders and their tails and manes, lustrous adornments, grew as God intended them—undocked and unclipped.

The footman at Peter's side, hitherto a statue, leaped to the ground on the instant that Peter had drawn in his reins, stalked swiftly to the sidewalk, became once more a statue, but with hand uplifted to his hat.

The girl in the victoria tripped nimbly to the walk and halted for one instant.

"Peter," she exclaimed, "wait here for a few minutes until I come."

"Yes, miss," returned Peter.

The girl walked very swiftly down the side street and turned the first corner. At that juncture she drew a sigh of relief; not only was she out of sight of her carriage, but, far down the dingy thoroughfare in front of her, she saw what she was looking for—three gilded balls that hung over the sidewalk.

She was very lithe and very graceful and unusually swift in her movements, and it was but an instant later that she stood in front of the little shop. Over her head were the gilded balls and over the door was a single name—the name of the owner of the shop:

SNAPE

She hesitated for the first time, glancing uncertainly to her right and then to her left, and once she started to retrace her steps.

At last, however, her lips tightened as with a final reserve and she pushed open the door of the shop of Snape and entered. Once within, she found herself confronted with a strange and unusual arrangement—a row of tiny little stalls, or boxes. There seemed no other way of approaching the counter or of transacting business, and she stepped therefore into one of these compartments.

Once inside, she perceived its wonderful advantage; she could see no one, except the man behind, and was herself unseen by any one but him—at least so she assured herself. She certainly was unaware of the presence of the young man with upturned collar and slouched hat in the compartment next but one.

The proprietor of the shop sidled along the narrow space behind until he reached her stall. He was a very lean individual, with very long, thin hands. These hands darted forth toward the girl as though they itched to grasp portable property, goods and chattels.

"Mr. Snape?" queried the girl.

The pawnbroker nodded.

"My name," he returned in a brusque business-like manner. "What have you got?"

The girl laid upon the counter an exquisite bit of workmanship. It consisted of a heavy bracelet, patterned and fashioned in a by-gone age and richly studded with what were apparently rubies.

"How much," asked the girl, her voice trembling for the first time, "can you lend me upon this?"

Snape, the pawnbroker, cast one glance at the heavy bracelet and then smiled quizzically into the eyes of his customer.

"About fifty cents," he said.

The girl stared at him for a moment, and then she leaned forward.

"I beg your pardon," she exclaimed.

Snape lifted his voice.

"About fifty cents," he repeated.

An expression of doubt, of fear, crossed the countenance of the girl. At that instant, unknown to her, the young man in the compartment next but one peered somewhat slyly around the corner of his stall to see what he could see. It is quite probable that he had been attracted by the newcomer's voice; it is quite certain from the unusual start which he gave as he feasted his eyes upon a vision of remarkable loveliness that he was considerably attracted by the girl herself.

Unconscious of his scrutiny, she was leaning forward, one arm resting on the counter, her lips parted, her eyes steadfastly upon Mr. Snape and her brow very charmingly puckered with her uncertainty and doubt.

"But," she was protesting, "it is a very valuable bracelet. It cost, well, a thousand, anyway, and I am quite sure more."

Mr. Snape picked it up and held it in his palm, not only for his own benefit but for the benefit of the young man. He drew down the corners of his mouth.

"This bracelet, miss," he said, "is made of brass; the rubies"—he shrugged his shoulders quite unconcernedly—"bits of crystal, nothing else. Have you tried to raise money on this elsewhere, miss?"

"Yes," she answered, flushing slightly; "I have at Partridge's."

"Ah," he remarked. "And at other jewelry-stores?"

"Yes," she responded faintly.

Mr. Snape viewed her through half-closed eyes. "And you haven't raised any money on it so far, have you, miss?"

"No," she whispered; "but I thought that——"

Snape nodded. He noted the sincerity in her countenance.

"What!" he exclaimed, "and do you mean to tell me that none of them told you it was spurious?"

"No," replied the girl; "and it can't be spurious. I know; it was my mother's." She stopped suddenly and her face paled. "I don't mean that," she went on; "I don't mean anything, except that I know it is genuine and very valuable." Her voice turned into its cool and more reasoning tone. "Its very pattern ought to tell you that it is very old," she said.

"Oh, as to that," Snape hastened to assure her, "there's no doubt about one thing, miss; some time or other, somewhere along the line, there has been a genuine article that looked like this. They never used to put up brass in this expensive shape. It is a copy, a counterfeit, that is all." He waved his hand as though that quite disposed of the subject, but it only deepened the girl's perplexity.

"You don't mean to say," she went on insistently, "that

somebody has, or may have, taken the original and put this in its place?"

Snape shrugged his shoulders with the air of one who knew these things to be of every-day occurrence.

"Just what I do mean, miss," he said; "but," he added, as though he would let her down easy, "I can tell you this: I've seen a good many clever counterfeits in my day, miss, but I never saw a phony piece done up so good as that."

"Phony?" she queried.

"Spurious," he explained; "but what I mean is that the man that did it did a mighty clever piece of work. There's only one man I know that could come anywhere near that."

She stared at him, wondering.

"And who is that?" she queried.

But Mr. Snape only smiled a mysterious smile.

"That is telling tales out of school, miss," he explained. "It's enough, isn't it, that I can't lend you any money on your bracelet?"

That fact, so apparent at the beginning of the conversation, was now slowly sinking into her innermost consciousness.

"And yet," she exclaimed, with some note of anguish in her tone, "I must have money."

"You can't get any on that bracelet," repeated Mr. Snape quite pleasantly.

"I see that," she returned.

She pursed up her lips and thought hard for a moment, her eyes looking quite through and beyond Mr. Snape, and then, with a formal little nod, she turned and left him and the shop.

The young man in the compartment next but one waited until she had disappeared. Then he, too, nodded to the pawnbroker.

"Excuse me for a moment, Mr. Snape," he said, and then darted swiftly after her.

She had almost reached the corner as he left the shop, and as she turned it the young man broke into a long-legged but not ungraceful run. He sprinted rapidly until he, too, had reached the corner, then, darting to the opposite side of the street, he slouched along unconcernedly, his hands in his pockets, his coat-collar well pulled up about his neck, his slouch hat well pulled down over his face.

In this wise he followed her until she reached the victoria. The young man uttered a low and almost inaudible whistle of surprise as he noted the turn-out.

He saw at a glance that it bore upon it the stamp of the very highest kind of respectability, drank in every detail of the team, the trappings and the vehicle itself.

The street by this time had become more or less filled with passers-by, and the young man, quite boldly and yet unnoted either by the servants or their mistress, floated along, a bit of the flotsam and jetsam of humanity, bringing up to within ten feet of the turn-out.

His eyes roved carelessly here and there, but he was seeking for just one thing, and that one thing he found —the monogram. When he found it—and there it was on the side of the victoria, an entwined K. S.—he whistled once more, this time not so much with surprise as with approval—approval of his own acuteness.

"I thought so," he whispered to himself.

"All right, miss?" queried the footman.

The girl with the slightly tilted hat nodded.

The footman darted to the other side of the victoria, leaped to his seat and touched Peter with his elbow. In another instant the handsome bays were clattering down the street, leaving the gaping crowd behind.

In the middle of this gaping crowd stood the young man, straining his eyesight to retain a glimpse of the girl with the slightly tilted hat. Slowly then he retraced his steps; but the girl went on.

When Peter had covered some six blocks in a straight line his voice once more groped around his collar.

"Where to, miss?" he queried.

"Partridge's," she said.

"Very well, miss," replied Peter.

At the next corner he drew his team sharply to the left and plunged into the center of the town.

At Partridge's the girl was ushered into the private room reserved for particular customers. From the time she entered the store the eye of every clerk was upon her, not because of her concededly attractive appearance, not because she was Colonel Kingman Stryker's daughter, not because her social position was the most secure in town, nor because her father could draw his check in seven figures; it was something else that made this girl unusually interesting to the force at Partridge's, to the salesmen in every establishment in town—something that had to do with the methods of Colonel Kingman Stryker himself.

One of the salesmen nudged his fellow.

"What's she doing here?" he mused. "The old man is not with her."

"Some repair work likely," returned his fellow clerk.

In the private customers' room Evelyn Stryker looked into the face of one of the members of the firm. She handed him the bracelet set with rubies.

"When I was here before," she said, "and tried to sell this to you, Mr. Partridge, you refused to buy it. I thought then that it was merely on account of Colonel Stryker."

"Yes," said Partridge.

"I find now," she went on, "that it was not on his account,"

"No," said Partridge.

"I am told," proceeded Evelyn, "that this bracelet is spurious, that it is worth practically nothing."

Mr. Partridge was palpably relieved.

"I am very glad, Miss Stryker," he assured her, "that you have found this out from some one else. We had a delicacy about the matter that——"

"Then it is true," exclaimed the girl eagerly and yet with a world of disappointment in her voice, "that the bracelet is brass, the rubies crystal?"

"Absolutely so," he answered. "It is a clever counterfeit."

"But," protested the girl, "you remember the original —my mother's."

"Very well," he responded; "and a very valuable bracelet, remarkable stones, wonderful workmanship."

Evelyn was puzzled.

"Then you know you are sure that there was an original?"

"Absolutely sure," he returned.

"What has become of it, then?" demanded Evelyn anxiously. "Who made the counterfeit? Who effected the substitution?"

Mr. Partridge's manner was almost like that of Mr. Snape, with a difference only in degree. He, too, shrugged his shoulders; he, too, spread his hands politely.

"Those, Miss Stryker," he replied, "are questions that the firm of Partridge cannot answer."

Evelyn became suddenly silent. She was confronted with a condition, not a theory.

She needed five hundred dollars in money—money that could be spent. She did not dare to let Mr. Partridge know this fact; she therefore hit upon the readiest expedition—a woman's.

"Mr. Partridge," she smiled, "this is only one of the things I came to see you about; the other is really more important. Can you show me some gold chains?"

"Hundreds of them," responded Mr. Partridge. "Have you any particular desire?"

"Yes," she answered, though with apparent uncertainty; "show me something with stones."

"Any kind of stones?" he asked.

"I think with amethysts," she answered.

Three minutes later she had selected with rare discriminating taste one of Partridge's most beautiful and most expensive bits of workmanship.

"I think," she said, "that I will take that one." She hesitated for an instant and then she looked Mr. Partridge full in the face. "And might I take it with me?" she inquired.

Once more he politely spread his hands and at the same time deferentially and yet very positively shook his head.

"You have some memorandum from your father, haven't you, Miss Stryker?" he inquired.

Despairingly she let her hands drop at her side.

"My father," she exclaimed, with a strange note of dissatisfaction in her voice, then something of baffled pride swept across her countenance and she glanced defiantly at Mr. Partridge, "Colonel Stryker, will approve of anything I do. He will pay for anything I buy, Mr. Partridge," she said.

Partridge was quite unmoved. He smiled, however, sympathetically.

"Unfortunately," he responded, "our experience is quite otherwise. Perhaps," he added, 'we can get him on the wire for you; doubtless he will authorize this purchase."

The girl flushed a bit angrily, but there was more of humiliation in it than offense. She arose and started toward the door, leaving the necklace on the table.

"It is not necessary, Mr. Partridge," she assured him, 'to bother my father about it now. I shall talk to him to-night."

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## CHAPTER TWO

THE young man with the slouch hat and up-turned collar entered once more the pawnshop of Snape. He sauntered easily into the compartment that he had occupied before. As he entered he noted that the shop, save for the presence of its proprietor, was empty. For some reason or other he was glad of that.

Snape, who was sitting at a desk counting a very soiled and dingy roll of bills, stopped at his work and came back to the counter.

"Well," he exclaimed, "what did you make out of her—a crook?"

The young man frowned; he became suddenly very earnest. His demeanor up to this time had held something of dash and recklessness in it of the lounging devil-may-care kind. He was very slender and reasonably tall, this young man of the slouch hat; his face was somewhat long, undeniably handsome in its careless way, and his eyes, when he permitted them full play, were unusually keen. The term "rakish" in a way effectually described him, and adventurer was written over him from top to toe.

"Snape," he said indignantly, "you know she was not any crook."

"Right," assented Snape. "What was she, then?"

"I'll tell you what she was," went on the young man; "she was one of my kind."

Snape looked sharply at the other; his glance indicated that he knew this young man's history from the dark ages up to date.

"Your kind?" he exclaimed in surprise. He smiled gently to himself. "Explain yourself," he added.

"Snape," responded the young man, "that girl with the phony bracelet moves in the upper strata of society. In that upper strata, Snape, there are no sports among the women, there are none of the people that we know, that we see and know, people with cash and without it; up there all the women are ladies and most of the men are gentlemen. That is where I belong, Snape."

"You?" repeated Snape once more in surprise.

"I," answered the young man. "Her kind of people are my kind of people, and she is my kind of a woman—the only kind of a woman."

Snape, too, became earnest.

"Do you mean to tell me——" he began doubtfully.

"I mean to tell you, Snape," said he of the slouch hat, "that the moment I heard her voice——"

"I agree with you," smiled Snape, flushing a bit himself, "she did have a voice—didn't she?"

"That voice," went on the other, "held a whole lot of things that appealed to me, but it held this one controlling note that conquered me—gentility."

He turned down his collar, pushed his hat back from his forehead and squared his shoulders.

"Gentility," he mused, as though talking to himself; "it's been calling to me for years. I wonder if there isn't some gentility lurking in my blood."

Snape vigorously shook his head.

"Not a drop of it," he said.

The young man permitted himself an inimitable gesture of the right arm, as though he held the universe at his feet. A strange glow shone within his eyes.

"Nevertheless," he said, "her voice is calling to me and I'm going to follow it. Snape, I'm going to be a gentleman."

Snape's lips no longer smiled; the man of the slouch hat was a bit too earnest just now to be made fun of, but the eyes of Snape jeered openly though somewhat sympathetically.

"Anything I can do for you?" he inquired, looking

about the dingy little shop. "No trouble to show goods, you know. If you're bound to go up, maybe I can give you a boost."

The younger man's lips curled almost contemptuously; his mind seemed to have already lifted itself into that social strata that he had spoken of.

"You," he exclaimed.

"Yes, I," returned Snape. He touched the young man on the arm. "How did you expect to rise? Were you going to lift yourself by your own bootstraps?"

The young man stared at him for a long while. It was easy to make resolves, but he had left out a consideration of the detail. Finally he nodded.

"Good for you, Snape," he went on; "you can certainly do something for me, if you will."

"I have done a whole lot in my time," began Snape.

"I don't know about that," replied the young man; "think of the things I have done for you."

"Well," finally returned Snape, "what can I do now?"

"Give me a pen," responded the young man, jerking his head toward the desk, "and I'll show you. You can sign a letter of introduction for me."

"Introducing you to whom?" asked Snape, interested.

"That's the question," said the young man. "Who do you know, anyhow?"

"The alderman of the Ninth Ward," responded Snape.

"He'll do," replied the young man feverishly. "Give me the pen and ink. What's his name?"

Snape told him and the young man hastily wrote this letter:

"HON. JERRY SULLIVAN:

"Dear Sir—This will introduce to you B. Bacheller, Esq., a friend of mine. Anything you can do for him will be appreciated by Your humble servant,

"....."

"There, sign that!" exclaimed the young man.

Snape read it over and opened wide his eyes.

"Your name is not B. Bacheller," he protested.

*"It is a copy—a counterfeit—that is all."*

The young man brushed the objection aside as he would have flicked a speck of dust from his coat lapel.

"It will be when I go up there," he said.

Snape eyed him quizzically for a moment and broke into a laugh.

"Do you really mean this," he said.

"Do you doubt it?" asked the young man. "Look at me."

"Gosh," returned Snape, "I believe you do."

"I certainly do," said the other, "and I'm going to make it. Watch out and see."

"B. Bacheller," mused Snape, half to himself. Then aloud: "And what does the B. stand for?"

"Benedick. B. Bacheler from henceforth—that is my name."

"All right," said Snape, not without a note of respect in his voice, "give me the pen and I'll sign."

He had no sooner done so than the door opened and a little wisp of humanity swept into the same compartment that Evelyn Stryker had occupied such a short time before. This wisp of humanity was also a woman. She held a cloth skirt in her hand.

Snape sidled down to her compartment, his countenance drawing itself once more into the familiar features of the pawnbroker.

"Well?" he demanded gruffly.

"Fifty cents on this," a weak voice faltered.

Snape took the skirt and held it to the light. In places it was torn, in other places worn through and frayed.

"Nothing doing," muttered Snape, "and don't come here any more."

"Will you give me twenty-five?" pleaded the voice of the woman.

"There's the door," said Snape. "Clear out."

There was a sound of despair from that particular compartment, but a small hand stretched itself out over the counter and gathered in the skirt; then a small form made its way out of the shop.

The young man with the slouch hat once more turned up his collar, once more pulled down his hat. He folded up the note of introduction and thrust it into an inside pocket.

"Good-night, Snape!" he exclaimed.

He paused on the threshold and turned back theatrically to Snape..

"Snape," he exclaimed grandiloquently, "I pass out of your life to-night."

"Ah," returned the pawnbroker, "but I don't pass out of yours, you know."

"So much the better for you, Snape," responded the young man; "so much the worse for me."

Once more he passed out of the shop and once more his eyes followed the figure of a woman.

This time he strode openly and noisily after her. Reaching her, he clutched her by the shoulder.

At first he took her for a child, but when she looked up into his face he saw she was no child; and, what was more, he saw that there was a grace and beauty still clinging about her face and figure that adversity had not obliterated.

He thrust his hand into his trousers pocket and drew forth a single five-dollar bill.

"Give me the skirt," he said; "the man inside has changed his mind. This is for you."

Momentary happiness sprang into her eyes and she stretched out one hand for the bill, eager to seize it. Then she drew back.

"It is not Snape that is doing this," she whispered, "it's you."

"Well," he commented, "what of it if it is?"

"But," she protested, as though placing herself quite on an equal footing with him, "you have just been to Snape's yourself. You need this yourself maybe almost as much as I do."

His grip upon her shoulder tightened.

"This," he returned, "is for you."

There was something in his tone of command that startled her, and she looked for an instant full into his eyes. She saw in that instant what everybody saw—the carelessness, the recklessness, the rakishness that seemed somehow to be part and parcel of the man, and she drew back all the more.

"No, no," she exclaimed hastily, trying to elude his grasp; "I can't take it; I can't take anything from anybody."

He almost shook her in his insistence.

"You look at me again, little one," he said gently, "and listen to me. You are going to take this money, you are going to spend it as you like, you are going your way and I am going mine."

He became haughty on the instant.

"You don't seem to recognize the fact," he said, lifting his head very high, "that I am a gentleman."

She stole another quick glance at his face and her manner immediately changed. She stretched forth her hand once more toward the bill.

"Oh," she gasped gratefully, "I will take the money and thank you very kindly, sir. I see you are a gentleman."

Half an hour later B. Bacheller, Esq., was closeted with the Honorable Jerry Sullivan.

"So you're a friend of Snape's?" inquired the Honorable Jerry.

"I am," admitted B. Bacheller.

"H'm," muttered the Honorable Jerry. "I'll pass you one compliment," he said.

"Do so," requested Bacheller.

"I'll say this for you, that you don't look it," said the alderman.

"Don't look what?" asked his visitor.

"Like a friend of Snape's."

B. Bacheller's eyes sparkled.

"Many thanks, sir," he replied.

"Well, now," went on the alderman, "what are you doing here? You must want something, or you wouldn't be here."

B. Bacheller drew his hand across his forehead.

"I want a job," he said.

Immediately the countenance of the Honorable Jerry fell and he waved his hands violently in the air.

The Honorable Jerry Sullivan was persistently pursued by a nemesis in the shape of the man who wanted a job. Day in and day out he could think of nothing else; he had no peace; his door-bell rang all night; he was assailed while walking in the street, while drinking at the bar, while sitting in the council-chamber.

"A-r-gg!" he snarled, "I thought you would be too decent—honest, now—to be looking for a job. Anything—I'll do anything for you but give you a job."

This was exactly what B. Bacheller had wanted him to say. If there was anything B. Bacheller did not want it was a job.

"We'll, I'll tell you," he conceded at length, "I won't bother you about a job, alderman. But will you do this for me? Will you give me a letter of introduction to a man who could give me one?"

"Ah, now you're talking," said the alderman; "that's a thing I'll do with pleasure."

Whereupon B. Bacheller seized a pen and wrote out another note that read about like this:

"DEAR SIR—The bearer of this note, B. Bacheller, is a friend of a friend of mine. Please treat him right."

Alderman Sullivan signed it. For two full days B. Bacheller strode up and down the streets like a roaring lion seeking whom he might devour. Invariably he asked and asked with unusual persistence, for something that the man before him could not grant. Invariably he took by way of compromise that which the other man granted to him with a sense of unutterable relief—a very friendly note of introduction.

On the third day he entered the portals of the most exclusive tailor in the town. Behind him at the tailor's he left five hundred dollars in cold, hard cash. Only B. Bacheller and a few other of his cronies knew from whence this cash had come.

On the fourth day Mr. B. Bacheller presented warm letters of introduction to five of the leading citizens in town, and inside of a week Mr. Benedick Bacheller, amply recommended as to respectability, engaged the only vacant suite of rooms in the La Grange—a suite situated fortunately upon the second floor.

On the day of his entrance into the arena of events at the La Grange he handed a ten-dollar bill to each of the two elevator boys.

"My son," he said to each of them separate and apart, "I shall have many kinds of visitors. My own kind you may fetch up on the elevator; but there will be other

kinds." By way of illustration he turned up his coat-collar and drew down his hat over his face.

The elevator boy nodded understandingly.

"When that kind comes," said B. Bacheller to the elevator boy, "show them to the stairs in the rear and let them walk back to my apartments, but always let them in. This is between you and me. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," said the elevator boy.

And that very night an unknown individual with a very much battered derby and a very shabby suit of clothes stepped up to one of the elevator boys and made an inquiry and received a brief direction.

Two minutes later he was in the apartments of B. Bacheller, facing the latter gentleman. The shabby gentleman, without a word, thrust his hand into the breast-pocket of his coat and drew forth a package of crisp fresh bills and laid them on the table.

B. Bacheller counted them, tossed them into a drawer and wrote a receipt.

"All to the good, Andy," he exclaimed, "and much obliged."

He stepped to a side table and placed before the disreputable-looking Andy a decanter and glass. Andy officiated to the extent of three.

"Swell stuff that, governor," he remarked, placing a grateful hand over his tingling insides, "and a swell joint this. Good-night."

He bowed very low and Andy of the battered hat made his exit from the apartments of Mr. Benedick Bacheller.

The next evening another mysterious individual attended at the La Grange—a long lean personage with a hungry face and very long, lean hands.

B. Bacheller smiled as he admitted him.

"Hello, Snape," he cried; "I thought I told you I had passed out of your life."

"And I told you," replied the pawnbroker, "that I had not passed out of yours."

Thereupon he deposited a neat, small black bag, slightly worn, upon the table. B. Bacheller never once glanced at it. He nodded to Snape.

"Snape," he said, "I want to ask a favor of you."

"I've done a heap of 'em for you," returned Snape.

"Tut, tut," replied Bacheller. "What have I done for you?"

Snape rubbed his chin.

"Come to think of it, maybe there were one or two occasions." He blinked his eyes. "What is it?"

B. Bacheller passed him a long list of names.

"Beginning," mused Snape, "with Aldcroft and ending with Yorke. Who might they be?"

"They might be anybody," said Bacheller, "but they happen to be the sixty-three members of the Chatelet Club across the street."

"What about 'em?" queried Snape.

Bacheller waved his hand.

"Get me anything of interest about them," he requested, "and then come back, especially anything in your particular line."

Snape sniffed cautiously.

"Not blackmail," he protested. "You're not going in for that?"

"Not quite blackmail," returned Bacheller.

## CHAPTER THREE

IN the music-room of the Stryker homestead Evelyn Stryker was facing a somewhat overgrown young man, fashionably dressed, whose face, due probably to a luxurious mode of living, was unusually flushed.

As they stood there talking, they heard footsteps in the hall. Instinctively an expression of alarm crossed the countenance of each; instinctively they became silent on the instant.

"It's father," whispered the girl with some note of fear in her voice.

The young man nodded, crossed the room, closed and locked the door.

"Now," he said, "go on."

In the glance with which he said it there was something of desperation, something of demand.

"Never mind apologies," he went on gruffly, "or explanations. Explanations are not cash. The point is: Did you get the cash?"

Evelyn shook her head.

"I've tried everywhere," she answered. "I have applied to everybody within reason, beginning with my father."

"Humph!" grunted the man. "Swell chance you'd have with him. I wouldn't even give him the satisfaction of asking him. But," he went on, "what about the bracelet?"

The girl was silent for a moment.

"Richie," she said at length, "it's harder for me to tell you about it than it was for me to ask father for money, and I've waited weeks. I've been everywhere with it and everybody tells the same story."

"They're all afraid of Colonel Kingman Stryker," grunted the boy.

"No," she answered; "the bracelet is brass and the rubies are glass."

Richie stared at her for a moment, the flush deepening on his face.

"Brass," he echoed. "Glass."

Something suspicious made itself apparent in his expression.

"You don't mean to say," he went on, "that you've been playing tricks, Evelyn. You don't mean to say that you substituted——"

The girl drew her breath sharply.

"Richie!" she exclaimed, as one in pain.

Richie shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he explained, "girls need money. I didn't know but that you might have been as hard up as I am. Gad, you don't know how hard up I am, Evelyn, and that's a fact."

Evelyn looked sharply at her brother and laid a pleading hand upon his arm.

"Richie," she said, "if you would only tell me why you need the money. I've worked as hard as I know to get it for you, but if you would give me the real reason I could go to father and make him——"

"Huh," returned Richie, "I'd like to see anybody make Colonel Stryker cough up money. A suit of clothes—yes. Food—yes. Dues at the club—yes. He will draw a check for anything he thinks you need, but not a cent for anything that you think you need."

He clenched his hands and stamped violently with one foot.

"Gad!" he exclaimed; "I've got to have it and I thought that you could get it for me. A woman always knows how to do these things."

His voice took on a tinge of reproach.

"I thought you could get it for me, and I think you can. I think if you half tried you could."

Still her pleading hand was upon his arm.

"Richie," she said, "I know you need it and I know you need it badly. I want to help you, and I can help you all the better if I know the reason why."

Richie was silent for a moment, and when he spoke again his voice was sullen, desperate.

"You're sure you want to know the reason why?" he asked.

"Yes," she returned eagerly.

He stepped back out of her reach.

"All right then," he exclaimed; "I'll tell you. It's because I'm married."

Her eyes grew wide at first with astonishment, and then wider still with fear.

"Married?" she echoed.

"Yes," he muttered, "and you might as well know it all. I didn't marry a girl like you, Evelyn. I suppose if I had been treated right I would have married somebody in our set. As it was, well, I am married to an actress—a Gaiety girl—and marrying a girl like that means ready cash, and if I don't get ready cash——"

They were both silent for an instant. Curiously the thoughts of both were focused upon one person—not upon the Gaiety girl, not upon each other, but upon their father, Colonel Kingman Stryker.

The girl had turned very pale. Richie Stryker's face was as red as fire. Upon them both was a horror which is surpassed by nothing in social life—a sense of terrible domestic fear.

There were no reproaches on the girl's lips. Her brother had not, so far as she felt now, committed any offense against her, or, if he had, it was swallowed up in the terror that was upon her. The only thing that Evelyn thought of was the effect upon her father and upon Richie and herself when her father came to know.

To her, as she stood there facing her brother, it seemed as though there was but one solution to the situation—Colonel Kingman Stryker must not know.

No matter how much later reflection might modify this feeling, the feeling was there now in all its intensity. Colonel Stryker must not know. She took up the conversation where they had dropped it.

"And if you don't get the money?" she asked.

Richie Stryker threw up his hands.

"Then," he replied, as though with crushing argument, "she will tell my father. There you are!"

It was two hours later that a man named Aldcroft ascended the brownstone steps of Colonel Stryker's house. Aldcroft was an aristocrat. He moved in the same social strata as did Colonel Stryker, and he was a member of the Chatelet Club.

Singularly enough, his name had been the first upon the alphabetical list of members that Benedick Bacheller had handed to Snape, the pawnbroker, in his apartments at the La Grange.

Aldcroft, too, was desperate; otherwise, he told himself, he would not have been seeking Colonel Stryker. But he sought him and he found him.

An instant after his admission he was facing Colonel Stryker in that gentleman's den on the first floor of the house.

"Colonel," he said, "I am not going to waste any of your time; I will come to the point at once. I am on the verge of bankruptcy; I am on the verge of something worse. There were trust funds; I was caught in the market; you know about that. I need twenty thousand dollars; I can't get it anywhere in town; you know that also. As a last resort I have come to you."

Colonel Stryker was a very tall and a very thin individual. He wore a delicate bit of side-whisker on each side of his face, but was otherwise clean-shaven. His whole appearance was gray; his face was gray.

Nowhere within him, judging by his appearance, was there a single drop of red blood. His nose was very thin and gristly; his mouth was a straight slit cut in his face beneath his nose; his eyes were as cold as winter and as keen.

"I knew you would come to me," said Colonel Stryker, opening his mouth to eject those words and closing it immediately.

He opened it once more.

"But I don't know why," he said.

Aldcroft drew up a chair.

"I will tell you why, Stryker," he went on. "In business life as well as in social life there is sometimes such a thing as gratitude. In my day, and I hope it is not over yet, I have put many a good thing in your way. You have made thousands out of me, Stryker."

"Well," returned the colonel, "what if I have? Suppose I had made a million, what then?"

Aldcroft's voice trembled in its appeal.

"Colonel," he said, "all that I need is twenty thousand dollars, but I've got to have that. I don't need more, but I can't get along with less. You've made hundreds of thousands out of the customers I have sent you."

Stryker shrugged his shoulders.

"If you had not sent them somebody else would, Aldcroft," he returned. "I worked for my money; you have had the same chances I had. I have never asked favors; why should you."

Aldcroft changed his tactics.

"Colonel," he said, "if I am not frozen out of business here in town, and if I can tide over the present situation I know that I won't be frozen out, and so do you. If I can tide it over I will be as sound as ever. My credit is good, so far; there are not a dozen people who know about this crash. If I get that money I can still throw business in your way—thousands in the future just as I have done in the past."

"Unfortunately," said the colonel, his thin lips parting in a grim smile, "you won't be able to tide over. I can't let you have the money."

So far there had been no feeling in the voice of either man, but on the instant Aldcroft's spirit seemed to break.

He knew that Colonel Stryker's ultimate decisions were not uttered in stentorian tones, nor with a crash of a

clenched hand upon the desk, and he knew, or felt, that this mild-mannered man across the table had said his last say. And yet——

"Colonel," he went on desperately, "I have known your family for years; we have hobnobbed at the club, at the functions, at the dinners; your children and my children have grown up together. Let me have the money, colonel, if only for the sake of friendship."

The colonel shrugged his shoulders.

"Aldcroft," he said in cutting tones, "you have worked that game for all it's worth. Your wife has been to my daughter and my daughter has come to me to make a plea for you. Your son has been to my son and my son has come to me. They have done all they can to get me to help you out. I have refused them and I refuse you. That is all. I am not obliged to state my reasons; I am not obliged to help you out. This interview is at an end. Good-night."

Aldcroft arose; his manner was changed.

"Colonel," he said, "there is one thing that you are known for in this town — your charity. You are head of the society for the prevention of cruelty to animals; you follow its principles out in your own household. You are head of the rescue home for women. You are the leading factor in the university settlements, the industrial homes, the missions. Colonel, I am a beggar and I want some of that charity; I need it. Figuratively speaking, I am on my knees. Will you give me what I ask?"

*The robber turned and faced him. Bacheller uttered an exclamation of surprise.*

Colonel Stryker shook his head.

"This interview is over," he repeated.

Again there was a change in the manner of Aldcroft. Now he became defiant.

"No hope?" he asked. "There is nothing I can do to induce you to let me have this money?"

"Nothing," returned the colonel shortly.

"Then, by heavens," returned Aldcroft, "I'm going to have some satisfaction out of this call to-night. I'm going to tell you something that you may not know. I hate you!"

"I knew that," returned Stryker.

"The whole town hates you," went on Aldcroft.

"No," replied Stryker; "only a few who call themselves the whole town."

"A minute ago," said Aldcroft, "I told you that the one thing you were known for in the town was your charity. I lied. What you are known for is your stinginess. You are the richest man in town. You call yourself a banker; the town knows better. You're a note-shaver, a note-broker. You bleed every man that comes in contact with you; you squeeze the last drop of blood out of your victims. I wouldn't be you."

"You couldn't," returned Stryker hurriedly.

"I would not," returned Aldcroft. "I would rather be indicted for the difficulty that I am in, and I would rather be sent up, with good intentions as my excuse, than to be what you are —a man whose very children can't get any money if they need it; than to be what the whole town calls you—a rat-tail file."

He turned swiftly and strode through the door without waiting for Colonel Stryker's reply. He went straight home into the presence of his wife and family and told them all about it.

The despair that was upon them deepened. They had hoped against hope that Colonel Stryker somehow, even at tremendous cost to them, would come to their aid. This hope had failed them.

Mr. Aldcroft was explaining to them the hopeless situation. A servant entered and handed him a note.

Aldcroft tore it open, read it, and then started to his feet.

"What is it, dear?" queried his wife.

"I don't know," said Aldcroft, "but it's a letter from a man whose name I never heard. He wants to see me, and I will go."

Aldcroft was a stock broker, and in that business, as

in many others, success is a matter of catching at straws. New customers were always straws. The man who had written him might be a new customer, and this was no time for Aldcroft to sit idle under his misfortune.

Five minutes later he was ushered into a second-floor apartment of the La Grange. A little Japanese servant guided him through two elegantly furnished rooms into a third, and commanded him to make himself at home.

As he looked about him he was startled. He knew everybody in town who was well worth knowing, and yet the occupant of this apartment must, from its appearance, be well worth knowing, though a stranger to him.

Aldcroft was a keen judge of values and he saw and felt that the quiet furnishings, the upholstery, the ornaments, that made this apartment what it was were worth thousands of dollars. There was no display, no garishness; everything was of the richest and simplest kind, with a decided leaning toward the antique.

"Mr. Aldcroft?" said a pleasant voice at Aldcroft's shoulder.

Aldcroft turned and beheld a very gentlemanly-looking young man.

"You are Mr. Bacheller?" he asked.

"Yes," replied that gentleman; "make yourself at home; have a cigar. Mr. Aldcroft," he went on, "I am a stranger to you, and yet there is one thing that I purpose doing without offering explanation or apology."

He seated himself, drew forth a narrow book from his breast-pocket and wrote in it for a moment. Then he passed it over to Aldcroft.

"I desire," he said politely, "to lend you twenty-five thousand dollars."

Aldcroft started.

"Why?" he asked, his color coming and going, as he looked B. Bacheller in the face.

"Because," said Bacheller, "you need it."

"How do you know I do?" demanded Aldcroft.

Bacheller shrugged his shoulders.

"I have curious means of finding out," he said. "The point is," he went on, "that I am going to lend it to you and you are going to take it."

Aldcroft's first impulse was to stretch forth his hand and seize the check, but he repressed it.

"Why do you do this, Mr. Bacheller?" he queried.

Bacheller flashed a frank smile upon him.

"Now you are talking," he returned.

He leaned forward and kept his glance very frankly fixed upon Aldcroft's countenance.

"Mr. Aldcroft," he said, "I am a stranger to you and I am a stranger to many of the men in town, especially of your kind. Twenty-five thousand dollars is nothing to me"—he said this with an air of sincerity that forced Aldcroft to believe him—"but there are other things that mean a good deal, that mean everything to me. I know that you need money very badly. I need something else quite as badly."

"What?" demanded Aldcroft.

Bacheller fixed the other man with his keen, compelling glance.

Mr. Aldcroft," he went on, "you are a member of the Chatelet Club. I desire to be a member of that club and you can make me one."

Aldcroft was upon his feet in an instant, his face flushing angrily.

"This, sir, is an outrage!" he exclaimed.

Bacheller leaned back, puffing in a very gentlemanly manner upon his perfecto.

"It would be an outrage, Mr. Aldcroft," he said, "if my suggestion were to cause you, at any time, regret. You must not overlook the fact that not only do I bear the outward stamp of a gentleman, but that I am a gentleman."

He paused to let that fact sink home. There was something hypnotic in his presence, something that compelled Aldcroft to believe that what he said was true.

"Some day, stranger as I am," went on Bacheller, "I shall become a member of the club. I desire to take a short-cut instead of going around the block. You need money to save yourself from bankruptcy, your family from disgrace, you from possible incarceration."

"How do you know that?" demanded Aldcroft once more.

Bacheller waved his hand.

"It's true, isn't it?" he asked.

Aldcroft did not answer.

"Suppose," went on Bacheller, "that you put my suggestion up to your wife, to your children? What would they say?"

Aldcroft sank into a chair. He knew well enough what they would say; knew that, so far as his family was concerned, there was no stone he should leave unturned. But his indignation still struggled to the fore.

"Do you think, sir," he demanded angrily, "that I would humiliate myself by telling my family, by telling anybody that you had made such an astounding proposition to me?"

Bacheller smiled.

"No," he said; "I don't believe you would humiliate yourself by telling anybody. I have the very highest opinion of you, Mr. Aldcroft," he went on, as though he was in every way Aldcroft's equal, "and I have no desire to humiliate you. Whether you accept this check or not, nothing that has passed between us will ever be known. But you will accept the check and you will do what I desire for your own sake and for the sake of your family. Let me leave you alone until you have decided. When you have decided, just press the button on this table here."

He arose without looking at his guest and swiftly left the room.

For ten minutes Aldcroft sat fiercely chewing the end of his cigar, thinking hard. At the end of that time he arose, strode to the table and touched the button.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

A FEW weeks later Mr. Benedick Bacheller, newly elected member of the Chatelet Club, was passing through the cardroom of the club when he heard a genial voice behind him—a voice tinged with surprise as well as welcome.

"Hello, Joe!" exclaimed this voice.

Bacheller turned on the instant. He had heard the

voice before, but he had forgotten where and had forgotten to whom the voice belonged, but now he saw.

Confronting him was McDermott, the mayor of the town. Bacheller changed color the instant that he looked upon the mayor. He glanced about him hurriedly to see whether the mayor's exclamation had been noted by any of the other members of the club, and was glad to realize that apparently it had not.

He seized the mayor firmly by the arm and drew him out of the room.

"Come down to the grill and we'll have a bite," he exclaimed. "I want to talk to you."

Once they were seated, the mayor smiled genially.

"I didn't know, Joe," he said, "as you would remember me."

"You remembered me, all right," said Bacheller in a low voice.

"I should think so," returned the mayor. "It will be a long time before I ever forget Joe Springfield."

Bacheller held up his hand and looked cautiously about the grill.

"Never mind Joe Springfield," he whispered. "My name is Bacheller."

The mayor's eyes bulged.

"Bacheller, eh?" he cried. "Why the change? You're not afraid of——"

"I am afraid," returned Bacheller, "of the reputation and occupation of Joe Springfield, and I don't mind saying so to you."

The mayor shut his eyes as though to summon memory to his aid.

"Joe Springfield," he mused. "Well, well, do you remember when I used to be chief of the police and you were——"

"Stop!" cried Bacheller in a low, almost threatening, tone of voice.

"All right," returned the chief, "but you were mixed up in a thing or two." He chuckled to himself. "Do you remember the Lombard emeralds? You were mixed up in that, all right, weren't you, Joe?"

A gleam of triumph flashed over the face of Bacheller.

"The Lombard emeralds?" he returned. "Yes; and you were mixed up in the Lombard emeralds, chief."

The mayor for one instant avoided his glance. There was some memory conected with the Lombard emeralds that evidently had an unpleasant savor to the mayor.

"H'm," conceded McDermott; "well, yes, we both of us were mixed up with the Lombard emeralds, I guess."

For the first time Mr. Benedick Bacheller's face widened into a gentlemanly grin.

"Under the circumstances, mayor," he said, "don't you think you had better forget Joe Springfield and I will forget the emeralds?"

The mayor pondered over this for a moment.

Clearly in his past as chief of police there was a tender spot, not for the limelight, connected in some way with the aforementioned jewels; something of graft or bribe or corruption, or even worse; something that the members of the Chatelet Club had never learned, and that they were destined never to learn the details of, which were unquestionably well known to Mr. Benedick Bacheller.

"H'm!" growled the mayor, "I suppose we might as well let bygones be bygones, Mr.——"

"Bacheller," said the other, tossing his card across the table; "I think that we might as well."

He held out his hand and the mayor met him half way. What the mayor, as chief of police, had known about Joe Springfield and what Joe Springfield had known about the mayor became on the instant a sealed book.

From that instant Mr. Bacheller went through the Chatelet Club as with a fine-tooth comb, seeking suspicion, looking for danger; but there was none.

The mayor had constituted the only soft spot in Mr. Bacheller's armor, and day by day the latter's position in the club became stronger and more firmly rooted. He made friends rapidly.

The one thing outside of his gentlemanly demeanor that aided him materially was his unconcerned expenditure of money. He never displayed money; he merely made it felt.

For a considerable while after his advent at the club he had held himself purposely aloof. The club members had sought him and had not been sought by him. He was a good fellow. He played cards recklessly and liberally. He loaned money as though he were accepting and not conferring a favor. After a while, from being merely passive, he became unusually active. He began to entertain.

It was a strange and curious fact that about this time, throughout the more fashionable quarter of the town, a series of hushed-up but important robberies had taken place.

The season was the fashionable season. Everybody, from Colonel Stryker down, was entertaining.

Colonel Stryker, it is true, had lost nothing, either at his dinners or at his daughter's big reception; but that was due to the fact that Colonel Stryker's home was singularly devoid of valuable portable property. His children wore but few jewels and the colonel's ornaments about the house were ponderous.

But it was a singular fact that, following every social function in town, some valuables had been missing. None of these robberies was the subject of burglary. The thief or thieves had not broken in. He or they had merely picked up in a wide-open house something that was left lying around loose.

Usually the disappearing article was a bit of jewelry, invariably jewelry of the most expensive character.

The first victim of this species of robbery was Warriner, whose wife had lost a diamond-studded miniature of Marie Antoinette, the miniature itself quite as valuable as its setting.

Warriner had not gone to the police; he had concluded at first blush that the theft had been perpetrated by a servant. While he was in his own way following this theory to earth, Yorke, another resident of the aristocratic quarter, had been victimized.

He and Warriner put their heads together, and while they had them together a third and yet a fourth disappearance had occurred at other houses in the neighborhood.

The servant question was abandoned and the affairs were religiously shrouded in mystery, for it now became apparent that the robberies were committed either by a guest or by some individual, male or female, clad in evening dress, purporting to be a guest or guests.

But, search as they might, investigate as they did, the victims were quite unable to arrive at any solution, satisfactory or unsatisfactory, of the mystery. They simply kept on losing valuables—that was all.

In the midst of this situation B. Bacheller, who had not as yet made his *entrée* into any of the local drawing-rooms, gave his first dinner of the season to a selected number of the members of the Chatelet Club.

Many of the invited guests attended his apartments at the La Grange, because they liked him and because they wanted to; others came out of curiosity.

They wondered; they wondered chiefly where this stranger got all his money and his taste, and while they wondered they ate his food and drank his old wines with relish. Unquestionably B. Bacheller knew a good chef when he saw one and he knew good wine when he bought it.

By midnight of the night of his first dinner the well-fed members of the Chatelet Club were falling all over each other in their attempts to slap their genial host upon the back and call him a good fellow.

As they left the dining-room, Yorke sauntered to a cabinet in Bacheller's living-room and glanced curiously at its contents. Bacheller noted his curiosity, and with several of his guests he approached Yorke, unlocked the cabinet and drew forth the object of Yorke's inspection —a glittering cluster of green jewels.

"These, gentlemen," said Bacheller proudly, "are the famous Lombard emeralds. You remember?"

Yorke started.

"You don't mean the Lombard case of ten years ago, right here in town—the robbery?"

"The very case," responded Bacheller, "and these are the very emeralds."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Yorke, as he passed them about from hand to hand. "Why, they must be worth——"

"The owner," went on Bacheller, "valued them at forty thousand dollars. They are worth that much to-day, at any rate."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Yorke; "and they were stolen," he mused reminiscently, "and the thief was caught."

"No," said Bacheller, "the emeralds were recovered, but the thief was never caught."

"Right," returned Yorke.

He looked somewhat keenly at Bacheller.

"How did you run across them, Bacheller?" he asked.

Bacheller shrugged his shoulders as he replaced the emeralds within the cabinet. He looked Yorke squarely in the eye.

"I bought them from the owner," he returned.

At that juncture in another room there arose an exclamation—a sharp, unusual exclamation from the lips of another guest. The guests crowded into that room like a flock of sheep without knowing exactly why.

"Who's making a noise?" queried the guests.

"Oh," exclaimed one of them, Warriner by name, "it was I."

He had picked up from an antique wooden stand an object that he now held aloft.

"I was just admiring this Marie Antoinette," he said.

There was a note of irony in his voice as he said it.

"Our friend Bacheller," he almost sneered, "has wonderful taste."

Bacheller looked at the article and nodded.

"Not bad," he exclaimed; "I picked it up the other day."

They crowded around to see what it was. To none of them, save Warriner, did it hold any particular significance. To the rest of them it was merely a miniature on ivory and set in a diamond-studded frame.

Two hours later Bacheller's guests had all departed—some quietly, some boisterously. Bacheller sat in his living-room wearily smoking his last cigar.

From a bedroom there now stepped forth an individual —one of the guests who had not gone.

Bacheller started in surprise.

"Why, Mr. Warriner," he cried, "I thought you went with all the rest."

Warriner's eyes glittered dangerously. He held his hat stiffly in one hand, his cane in the other.

"Mr. Bacheller," he said quietly, "I wish you would tell me where you got that Marie Antoinette miniature in the other room."

His host flushed slightly.

"W—why," he stammered, "I picked it up at some—er—old curiosity shop in town; I don't just know where, and I got it fairly cheap."

Warriner took one step forward.

"Mr. Bacheller," he said, "that miniature was stolen from my house less than two weeks ago."

Bacheller leaped to his feet in surprise. He stared at Warriner.

"Stolen!" he exclaimed.

He strode into the other room and came back with the miniature.

"Mr. Warriner," he said, "will you give me your word that you are the owner of this gem?"

"Of course I am the owner," spluttered Warriner. "I can prove it by all the members of my house."

Bacheller handed it to him.

"It's yours, Mr. Warriner," he said; "take it along."

Warriner took it and dropped it into his overcoat-pocket.

"Is this all you've got to say, Bacheller," he exclaimed, "simply that you bought it somewhere in town."

Bacheller smiled gently and spread his hands.

"Mr. Warriner," he exclaimed, "you come into my apartment as my guest and claim ownership to a piece of my property. I surrender it to you. The incident is closed."

It was an hour later that Bacheller, who had been sleeping very soundly, for his duties as host had fatigued him, was suddenly awakened. He was awakened by the sound of some one groping, creeping stealthily about in the next room.

Noiselessly he sprang to his feet, seizing a hammerless revolver from underneath his pillow; noiselessly, in his pajamas, he stepped to the threshold of the living-room.

He was right; his ears had played him no tricks. He waited behind the protection of a portière for one instant until his eyes became accustomed to the dark. Within easy reach on the other side of the portière was an electric switch imbedded in the wall. Bacheller did not stretch

forth his hand and touch it; he merely watched and waited.

Stealthily the figure guided itself about the room, almost literally inch by inch. Not a chair was displaced; not once did the marauder jostle a table or stand. Slowly but surely the figure wriggled its way across the room and laid one hand upon the door of the cabinet upon the wall.

Bacheller remembered that he had failed to relock the cabinet. He remembered also that the Lombard emeralds reposed therein. He waited until the thief had opened the beveled glass door, waited until he had seized the glittering object, waited until he had crossed the room and until his hand was upon the door leading into the hallway. Then Bacheller swept on the lights, took a firm grip on his hammerless revolver, and strode into the room.

"Halt!" he cried in stentorian tones.

The robber turned and faced him. Bacheller uttered an exclamation of surprise.

The thief was one of his own guests, who had remained secreted somewhere in the apartment after the other guests had gone.

"You!" exclaimed Bacheller.

The thief turned white and dropped the emeralds upon the floor.

"Yes, I," he stammered guiltily.

The thief, be it said, was a young gentleman of the name of Richie Stryker.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

BACHELLER pointed to a chair. "Richie," he said, "sit down. I want to have a talk with you."

Richie sat mumbling in his fright.

"I was drunk," he stammered.

"No," returned Bacheller; "you were not drunk, Richie. No drunken man could move about in the dark as you have done just now."

Richie drew his hand across his head.

"I'm a somnambulist," he exclaimed wildly. "I fell asleep. I do these things in my sleep sometimes."

"What things?" demanded Bacheller. "You mean you always steal jewelry in your sleep?"

"No, no, no," hastily returned Richie; "I never steal jewelry; I never steal anything. I mean that I do queer things; I am out of my head sometimes."

"Oh," went on Bacheller, "and what do you do when you are out of your head? Were you out of your head when you sold Major Warriner's miniature to somebody here in town? Were you out of your head when you stole it?"

For answer Richie Stryker cowered down in his chair and hid his face.

"I don't care what you do," he wailed; "only don't let the colonel know."

"The colonel?" queried Bacheller.

"My father," returned Richie; "don't let him know. I'll run away, I'll disappear, I'll leave you alone, I'll dig in a ditch—only don't let him know."

Mr. Benedick Bacheller drew a long breath.

"You think, friend Richie, that the town would probably sit up and take notice, do you, if it knew that you had been caught red-handed in the act of larceny? All right, let's make a bargain, you and I. What are you willing to give me to hush it up? What are you willing to do?"

"Anything!" cried the abject Richie. "I'll work my fingers to the bone for you; I'll do anything you say."

Bacheller arose, strode to a side-table, poured out a quantity of brandy in a glass and handed the glass to Richie Stryker.

"Brace up," he said; "drink this; have a cigar. You will feel better. I want to talk to you."

Richie did as he was directed and the prophesied result followed; he did feel better.

"Now," said Bacheller, "you tell me why you have to steal."

"Because," murmured Richie, "I've got to have money."

"Can't you get money?" asked Bacheller. "Your father is the richest man in town."

"And the tightest," responded Richie. "You might think I could earn money, and I could if he would only let me alone. I do earn it, anyway, but I don't get it. I live the life of a dog, Mr. Bacheller. What am I? Secretary of all the charities in town. And what salary do I get? What he pays me. When I need money—ask him for it. He is what you call a good provider. He buys your clothes and buys your food, lots of it, and a big roof over your head. What more does a man want? That's his idea."

Bacheller seized him by the wrist.

"Why have you got to have money," he demanded, "just to spend?"

"No," groaned Richie; "to pay."

"To pay what—gambling debts?"

"No," muttered young Stryker; "blackmail."

B. Bacheller was pleasantly excited. He hitched up his chair a little closer.

"Who is blackmailing you, Richie?" he queried.

"Aw," said Richie with a gesture of infinite despair, "my wife."

"Your wife blackmailing you," said Bacheller. "That's a funny note for a wife to blackmail her husband. Who is your wife?"

"She's an actress," groaned Richie.

"So," returned Bacheller; "and you are really married to her?"

"Sure," replied Richie.

"Do you care for her?"

"Certainly I do."

"And does she care for you?" asked his host.

"She says she does," returned Richie.

"How then does she blackmail you?"

Young Stryker drew his hand across his face. His whole figure bore evidence of the despair that assailed him.

"She's going to tell the colonel that we are married," he exclaimed in awestruck tones.

"Oh," exclaimed his host, "do you mean to say that you have never told the colonel, never told your father that you are maried?"

"No," groaned Richie, "and you wouldn't either, if the colonel was your father."

"You're not afraid to tell him?" smiled Bacheller.

For answer Richie shivered.

"Afraid!" he muttered. "Is there anybody in town that is not afraid of my father—Colonel Stryker? There's nothing I am afraid of so much as I am of him."

"I'm not afraid of him," responded Bacheller.

"You wait until you run up against him," said Richie, "and you'll see."

"What is your wife's name?" queried Bacheller pleasantly.

"She was Isabel Caruthers," groaned Richie, his head between his hands.

Bacheller started.

"I know Belle Caruthers," he responded. "She's a Gaiety girl."

"Yes," said Richie; "it was a runaway match. I fell in love with her and we went off and got married, and then we came back, and I began to think of the colonel."

He shuddered and shook his head.

"The cold, gray dawn of the morning after," he exclaimed.

"How is she blackmailing you?" asked Bacheller.

"Oh," said his unscrupulous guest, "she is married to the son of Colonel Kingman Stryker and she thinks everybody ought to know it. She wants to break into society, and she thinks if the colonel knows it he will break her in. Meantime, until she peaches on me, I've got to support her in the style that I am accustomed to. I've got to put off the fatal day, and meantime I've got to soft-soap her with jewelry and motor-cars and furs. You see the point?"

Bacheller blew smoke rings toward the ceiling.

"I see," he returned, rising.

He strode to the outer door and opened it.

"Richie," he said, "go home and go to bed."

Richie stared at him.

"You don't mean to say——" he began.

"I mean to say," went on Bacheller, "that you are to go home and go to bed. You are not to run away or try to run away. If you do I'll get you; I'll spend my last cent to disgrace you. You are not to commit suicide, for all hades is waiting for you. Go home and go to bed, and to-morrow morning see me in the cardroom of the Chatelet Club at eleven o'clock. Good-night."

He pushed the dejected Richie out of the door, locked the door behind him, crossed the room and replaced the emeralds in the cabinet upon the wall.

It was five o'clock to the minute on the next day when Mr. Bacheller handed his card to the bellboy of the Marguerite.

"And," he added glibly, "by appointment."

An instant later he entered the apartments of Mrs. Richie Stryker. She was, as he had explained to the boy, expecting him.

She was seated at her tea-table, that wondrous point of vantage, and she arose expectantly as he crossed the softly carpeted room with outstretched hand.

She started forward to meet him and then drew back, a puzzled expression crossing her countenance.

"You are Miss Caruthers?" he queried, using her professional cognomen.

"Yes," she replied a bit stiffly and with an air of the grand lady about her which was very successfully assumed, "but you are not Mr. B. Bacheller."

Mr. Bacheller bowed low.

"May I make myself at home?" he asked.

Without waiting for an answer he drew a glit chair up to the table and seated himself.

Still was the lady puzzled. Suddenly, however, a look of recognition swept across her face and she smiled with just a trifle of contempt, not unmixed with fear, in her features.

"Now, I know," she went on vivaciously, but in a tone of disappointment, "you are Mr. Springfield, aren't you?"

He held his hand poised in air.

"Is that a chapter of your life you desire to reopen?" he queried.

"What chapter?" she asked in turn.

He flashed a smile of understanding at her.

"There was a time," he mused, "when you used to seek me out, wasn't there? I remember you and you remember me. You will recall that we always met at the same place. Shall we discuss it?"

A pink flush spread across her face—a flush not only of annoyance, not only of fear, but also of regret, possibly of shame.

Mr. Bacheller smiled as he noted these symptoms and shook his head.

"You know," he said, "there's nothing to be ashamed of; poverty is no disgrace."

"It is to me," she answered.

He looked about her neat little apartment.

"You are no longer poor," he went on eventually; "but, of course, the reason is not far to seek; "you have married money."

Isabel Caruthers almost clapped her hands.

"He has announced it then," she said.

But the happiness in her eyes again faded at his look.

"He has announced it," he answered, "only to myself in secret. It rests with you, Miss Caruthers, as to whether and how soon anybody else shall know. May I ask for a cup of tea? No sugar, please."

"May I ask," she returned, as she complied with his request, "just what you mean by your last remark but one? What am I to do, and how am I to do it?"

"Ah," said Mr. Bacheller, settling himself back in his chair, "let us be quiet while we drink this cup of tea."

Very much against the lady's will, there was silence for a moment. Then Mr. Bacheller put down his cup and held Miss Caruthers once more with his hypnotic glance.

"Why do you send your husband out to steal?" he asked.

Miss Caruthers stared at him aghast. At her request he repeated his question thrice.

"Won't you please explain?" she finally requested.

Mr. Bacheller explained very briefly, stating his experience with Mr. Richie Stryker the night before.

He did not go into his conversation with Mr. Stryker at the Chatelet Club that day, but he gave a graphic account of the attempted robbery of the Lombard emeralds and repeated almost word for word Richie's confession.

Miss Caruthers' face was one not only professionally but also quite naturally expressive. Through the con-

flict of varied emotions that made themselves apparent there, admiration struggled to the fore.

"I didn't know Richie had the nerve," she exclaimed.

"He didn't," replied Mr. Bacheller. "Desperation is not nerve, it is simply instinct. He was between the devil and the deep sea. You are the devil."

"Mr. Springfield!" she protested in alarm.

For answer he pointed to his visiting card that lay beside her cup of tea.

"Mr. Bacheller," she corrected; and then, waiving the question aside for the instant, she inquired as to the identity of the deep sea.

Mr. Bacheller told her all about the idiosyncrasies, proclivities and mental peculiarities of Colonel Kingman Stryker, the fear that he inspired in his immediate household and how unapproachable he was, save from any standpoint but his own.

"You didn't know you had married a thief then, Miss Caruthers?" queried Bacheller.

Miss Caruthers laid her hand upon a necklace that she wore and glanced about her well-decorated rooms.

"I am shocked," she answered "and I can't understand. I assumed that Richie could use millions, if he wished to do so."

*"Why do you send your husband out to steal?" he asked.*

For the first time Mr. Bacheller looked at her with a really friendly air. He held out his hand again and seized hers.

"Miss Caruthers," he exclaimed, "we are both in the same boat. All our lives undoubtedly we have felt within us the same ambition."

"I care nothing about money," said Miss Caruthers quite grandly, but with evident sincerity.

"Nor I," responded he, "save for the one thing that it is going to bring to me—gentility."

Then it was Miss Caruthers' turn to clasp him by the hand.

"We are pals," she now conceded with an adorable shrug of her shoulders, falling into profesional slang and mannerism. "Mr. Bacheller, you're on."

"Yes," he returned; "but you never will be at the gait you are going."

"What gait?"

"You are trying to force the issue," he returned. "You are trying to push your way into society by your shoulders. I am not saying anything against the shoulders, but you can take it that way, my dear. Listen to me. There's nothing against you, is there?"

She looked him squarely in the eye.

"Nothing," she replied.

"I knew it," he went on, "and you've got the making of a social lioness. You're quick, companionable; you can attract women quite as well as men, but you can't force your way into the Stryker circle of society. Even Richie can't get you there himself. You have been laboring under the delusion that if he told the colonel all about you, you could win the colonel over. That was a mistake. Just so long as you adopt that course, Richie is going to try to substitute cash for social eminence, and he is going to steal the cash, and when he's caught your will be the wife of a thief and nothing more. The colonel would cast Richie off in the twinkling of an eye. Let me tell you," he went on eagerly, "how to do this thing. Just go up in the fashionable quarter and live for months--years, if need be—with your mother, sister, aunt. Keep this Richie Stryker marriage quiet. Just be yourself; use your wits. I'll help, and in good time—it won't be very long—you'll find that somebody is going to take you up. Every man on the Square will fall in love with you, except myself."

"And why not you?" she asked.

"Oh," returned he, "my future is fixed, like yours. I am a man of destiny and I am destined to fall in love but once."

"And have you?" she queried with a laugh, and studying his face for the answer.

"That's telling," he responded; "but please don't interrupt. There is no more reason, my dear, why young Richie Stryker, under the circumstances I outlined, with every single man in the Chatelet Club head over heels in love with you—it doesn't matter whether they have known you before or not, they will keep your secret—I say it will be the easiest thing in the world for Richie Stryker openly to make love to you and the old rat-tail file will find it difficult to object. As it is now"—he

shrugged his shoulders—"it's a far cry from a Gaiety girl to a woman of the West End set."

Belle Caruthers thought for a moment and then nodded her head.

"I think I see my way clear," she exclaimed at length, "except upon one point—I must have money."

Mr. Bacheller brought out his slender checkbook and tapped it.

"I told you I would help," he said.

She drew back in alarm.

"But I can't permit you to do it," she protested.

He folded his arms and frowned.

"You can't help yourself," he said very curtly. "I've got the upper hand."

"The upper hand," she returned breathlessly. "I don't quite understand."

"I will make it very plain," he said. "There's only one way for me to help Richie Stryker out of this scrape. You are a woman and you married him for one purpose—to climb into society on Richie's shoulders. If you don't get what you want it means that—oh, well, you will get it, that's all, or you'll break Richie. I've got to stand between you and the old rat-tail file, which means that I've got to accomplish for you the end that you so much desire. Having the upper hand of Richie, I also have the upper hand of you, and, as I have already said, I must get Richie out of this scrape, and get him out right."

"Why must you?" she demanded, the look of fear again creeping into her eyes. "Why are you so interested in Richie Stryker?"

"Because," he replied, "Richie Stryker can do something for me."

"Oh," she exclaimed, "then you are putting on the screws, you are forcing the issue, you are doing what you said I could not do."

"Exactly," he returned. "And do you know why?"

"No," she answered, puzzled.

"Because," he returned, "I know how to accomplish it, and you do not."

At that instant the door in the next room opened and a stealthy figure entered. It was Richie Stryker making an afternoon call upon his wife.

"It's awful," groaned Richie, "this game of sneaking in and sneaking out again. Why, hello, Bacheller."

He started in surprise as he saw that gentleman.

That gentleman returned his salution with a fixed stare.

"Well?" finally returned Mr. Bacheller, as though waiting for an answer to an unspoken question.

"Oh," cried Richie, relieved as he understood its purport. "Don't forget, old man."

He straightened up and looked doubtfully toward Miss Caruthers, then his glance returned to Bacheller.

"Don't forget, old man," he stammered on, "you are to dine with us, our house, you know, on Tuesday night, next week."

Isabel Caruthers groaned. She would have given half her life to have an invitation of that kind extended to herself.

Mr. Bacheller cast a glance of superiority upon her and held his head very high as he left the room. He felt that he was breaking in at last.

## CHAPTER SIX

"WILL you show it to me, please?"

The voice which uttered these words was the voice of Benedick Bacheller. He was seated in the music-room at Colonel Stryker's. He had seated himself there with more or less frequency for the last three months. He seemed, in that very gentlemanly way of his, to be very much at home.

He was not alone in the music-room. Seated at the colonel's ivory tinted baby-grand piano, her bare arm resting lightly on the keys, was Evelyn Stryker. She was doing her best, and had done so for many moons, to make Mr. Bacheller feel at his ease.

Mr. Bacheller had that strange quality of mind and temperament, that air of comradeship, which made a woman desire to tell him things. He invited confidence and confidences. It was a strange confidence that Evelyn now reposed in him. She had no sooner done so than she regretted her hasty action.

But he was intensely interested. One would have described his interest as almost professional. He repeated his request.

"Will you show it to me, please?"

Evelyn hesitated for a moment. Then she opened a little drawer in a cabinet that stood to her right and drew forth the bracelet set with rubies—the bracelet which Mr. Snape so long ago had described as being "phony."

Mr. Bacheller seized it and scrutinized it with care.

"Of course," he said, "it's a counterfeit, but that is not the point. I didn't want to see it out of idle curiosity; I only wanted to find out if I could help. You have no idea who made the substitution, I suppose."

Of course, Mr. Bacheller knew, or felt he knew, that the actual substitution had been made by Richie Stryker. His question, therefore, was but an idle one made to cover up his minute inspection of the bracelet. When he had finished he glanced at Evelyn appealingly.

"Will you let me help you?" he asked.

Evelyn's eyes were very grateful.

"You have helped me in such a lot of ways, Mr. Bacheller," she said; "you have been such a good friend to Richie—but how can you help me in this respect? How can you do what none of the jewelers and none of the private detectives in town have been able to accomplish?"

"Oh, I don't know," he responded; "I had an idea I might know the man who did this thing."

"Might know him," Evelyn faltered. "Are you an amateur detective?""

He shook his head.

"Nor a professional," he returned; "but I'll wager ten to one that I can name the man that manufactured this."

"Name him," she responded.

Mr. Bacheller's mind seemed to be groping into the mental distances for aid.

"His name," he finally remarked, "is Parlaman."

It was not enough for Mr. Bacheller that he was on friendly terms with Mr. Richie Stryker, not enough that he was on friendly terms with Richie's sister Evelyn; he had also forced the issue with the colonel. He had done it by a very simple method—that of exhibiting a

real, and not merely an apparent, interest in the colonel's charities.

On this evening it was the colonel who sought him and not he who sought the colonel. In that imperious way of his, the colonel had stalked into the music-room, had broken up without ceremony the little tête-à-tête and had beckoned Mr. Bacheller into his study, if such it might be called.

"Bacheller," he said, handing that gentleman a cigar, "the other night you talked to me as though you meant business. What I want to know is what you are going to do about it now."

For answer his guest drew forth the slender check-book, wrote in it for a moment, and then tossed a check over to the colonel.

The colonel looked at it, and, millionaire as he was, his eyes bulged in surprise. He was accustomed to large figures, but not in charity.

"Fifty thousand dollars," he exclaimed weakly. "Is this a joke?"

"Not a bit of it," responded Mr. Bacheller.

The colonel eyed him quizzically and with a humorous expression, which was intended to cover his real curiosity.

"Where do you get all your money, Bacheller?" he asked.

There was no humor in Bacheller's expression as he answered this question with another.

"Where do you get yours, colonel?" he queried quietly.

The colonel squared his shoulders.

"Made it in legitimate business," he responded. He rattled the check in his hand. "What am I to do with this?" he asked.

"That check," said Mr. Bacheller slowly, "is going into one of your charities, colonel, but it's not going there quite yet."

"Which one?" asked Colonel Stryker, interested. "The S. P. C. A. or the Settlement, or what?"

"Into none of these," replied B. Bacheller. "It's going into a new charity, one that you have never dabbled in, one that has a tremendous object. It is a project to furnish money to the poor."

The colonel pricked up his ears; he also vigorously shook his head in disapproval.

"Money to the poor!" he exclaimed. "I never heard of such a thing. You don't give money to the poor, you give them food, education, clothes, comforts, but not money; that's a big mistake."

"It's not a big mistake," responded Benedick Bacheller, rising, and one of these days I am going to prove it. What everybody wants, colonel, from the pauper in the poor-house up to yourself, is money. It's the one great comfort of mankind."

"But," protested Colonel Stryker, "you don't want this fifty thousand distributed in coin to the poor?"

"That fifty thousand," said Mr. Bacheller, "stays in your bank account until I say the word. Until then, good-night."

It was a half-hour later that he turned into a narrow dimly lighted side-street in the other end of the town.

He turned up the collar of his long, dark overcoat and buttoned it in front to hide the gleam of his white shirt-front. He drew down his slouch hat a bit over his face. He slunk along in the shadows, glancing furtively up and down. He was glad to note that the street was deserted. He had passed no police officer on his way and there was none now in sight.

He halted before a narrow alleyway, listened for a moment, looked once more up and down and then disappeared into the narrow thoroughfare.

At the end of the alleyway was a door. Upon this door he rapped three times in succession, then paused and rapped twice and then three times again.

A moment later he heard shuffling, cautious footsteps creeping along the hallway. In another moment the door was opened and he stepped within. The door was closed behind him and he stood in a corridor as black as midnight. As he stood there some one gripped him by the arm and in another moment an electric flash was thrust into his face.

A groan of terrified surprise issued from the holder of the flash in one instant and in the next a murmur of recognition.

"It's you, Mr. Springfield," said a gruff voice. "I wouldn't know you in those togs. Come in."

Still holding Mr. Bacheller by the arm, his unseen host drew him along the hallway and thrust him silently into a room at the farther end. The room was a somewhat spacious room, but very much cluttered up with bags and boxes and garments suspended from the four walls upon hooks. In the corner was a huge safe.

The man who had let him into this room resumed his seat at the workbench. By his side was a blow-pipe furnace with its fire extinguished. The man at the workbench was tremendously ugly and tremendously burly. He seemed all bone and muscle. He would have been a match for three of Bacheller's kind.

"Got something for me?" asked the man at the bench, searching Bacheller's face with his cunning eyes. "Let's see," he went on, "you never brought anything to me before, did you, Mr. Springfield?"

"I've brought something now," said Bacheller, and he placed before the eyes of the man at the bench the bracelet of brass.

"Parlaman," he said, "you've got the original of that. I would like to see it, please."

"How do you know I've got it?" queried Parlaman, glaring at his visitor.

His visitor returned the glare with interest.

"Just let me see it, Parlaman," he repeated.

Parlaman crept to his safe and opened wide the door. Mr. Bacheller smiled as he caught a glance of its contents. The safe was full to overflowing with all kinds of jewels and baubles. Some of them had lain there for years, and for good reason. Mr. Parlaman could not afford as yet to have them see the light of day. He and B. Bacheller were among the few in town who knew that the safe was full of stolen things. He knew that Parlaman was one of the richest and most cunning fences east of Chicago; big enough, some said, to own police departments.

Parlaman crept back to his workbench and laid down the counterpart of the brass bracelet. Bacheller picked both bracelets up and held them for scrutiny under the light.

"Gad!" he exclaimed; "but that was a slick piece of work that you did, Parlaman."

Parlaman nodded in acknowledgment of the tribute. He knew he was clever and he liked to hear people say so.

"Not bad," he returned; "not bad at all."

Bacheller laid down one of the bracelets on the work-bench and started off.

"I just wanted to see the original," he explained. "Now that I've seen it, I am satisfied."

Parlaman did not stir. He simply fixed Mr. Bacheller with his cunning leer and clicked his teeth.

"And now that you've seen the original," he repeated, why do you slip it into your coat-pocket, Mr. Springfield? Why do you leave me the counterfeit?"

Mr. Bacheller evinced no surprise at being found out. He turned with his hand on the door-knob, well knowing that he could not leave the room without the physical consent of Parlaman, and he surveyed that gentleman with a glance of infinite contempt.

"I slipped the original into my pocket, Parlaman," he said, "because I am going to take it with me. Do you understand?"

"No," snarled Parlaman, leaving the bench and darting to the side of Bacheller; "you are not going to take it with you. You are going to leave it here."

Bacheller touched him a bit angrily on the shoulder.

"Parlaman," he said, "this bracelet was stolen by a man named Richie Stryker. He has also stolen other things."

Parlaman glanced at Bacheller in genuine alarm.

"How do you know?" he demanded.

"I know," replied Bacheller, "because Richie Stryker has been found out."

"By whom?" cried Parlaman, his eyes widening with fear and caution.

"By the man," returned Bacheller, "who owns the Lombard emeralds. He recently tried to steal them from that man."

"Who is that man?" asked Parlaman.

"Me," responded Bacheller.

"You?" demanded Parlaman. "Why, it was you——"

"No," went on Bacheller easily, "it was you and it was the chief—McDermott, I mean—who were mixed up with the Lombard emeralds. I was not mixed up with them, though I own them—understand?"

Side by side the minds of these two men traveled backward over the past few years. Some terror that in the past had seized one of these men now made itself again apparent and he trembled from head to foot. It was a chapter which he hoped would never see the light of day.

Parlaman clutched Bacheller by the wrist.

"You have the whip-hand," he admitted.

"I should think I had," replied Bacheller, crowding into his glance all the disgust and contempt that he felt for the man before him.

He drew out of his pocket the genuine bracelet and held it in his palm.

"Shall you keep this, Parlaman," he asked, "or shall I?"

Parlaman's manner changed. His face grew livid and he stamped upon the floor. Then, slipping off the catch, he threw wide the door and pointed into the dark and narrow corridor.

"Go, blackmailer!" he exclaimed.

Mr. Bacheller, who did not care what Parlaman called him just at that time, seeing he had made his point, left the room, stalked with dignity down the hallway, waited until Parlaman had unlatched the outer door and then walked serenely forth.

The next evening he was once more in Colonel Stryker's music-room. Carelessly he thrust his hand into the pocket of his evening coat and carelessly passed over the gold and ruby bracelet.

"With Mr. Parlaman's compliments," he said.

Evelyn took the bracelet with a smile on her lips. The smile died away as she noted the difference in weight. Her face became frightened as she realized that the thing she held within her hand was genuine, not spurious.

"Who is Mr. Parlaman?" she demanded.

B. Bacheller shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, he's a fence," he explained glibly; "a receiver of stolen goods. An infamous character, whose name is never mentioned in public. He is a thief."

"You know him?" she queried.

"Yes," he said; "I've known him for years."

"How did he get it?" she went on.

Mr. Bacheller smiled.

"You had better ask him that," he said. "He knows. Perhaps nobody else does."

She drew the bracelet over her slender wrist and stared at it as though fascinated for a time. Then a troubled expression crossed her forehead and there was fear in her eyes as she looked at Bacheller.

"Mr. Bacheller," she said, "how did you get this bracelet?"

Bacheller smiled.

"He called it blackmail," he returned.

The girl leaned forward and touched him gently on the arm.

"Mr. Bacheller," she went on, "I've told you a whole lot about myself; I don't know why. Will you tell me something about yourself, please?"

For the first time while in her presence a deep, uncomfortable flush covered Mr. Bacheller's face. There was no mistaking it, he was deeply and unusually perturbed. He saw that she noted his embarrassment, and he tried somewhat unsuccessfully to regain his composure.

"What do you want to know about me?" he asked.

The girl caught her breath for an instant, and then plunged boldly in.

"Who and what are you, Mr. Bacheller?" she inquired frankly. "The whole town talks about you, even Colonel Stryker, and nobody knows—do they?"

"Some of them," replied Bacheller, "think they know, but they are all wrong. Those who do know, know from a personal acquaintance with me. My past history, for that reason, is quite as safe with them as theirs with me."

"I don't understand," returned the girl. "Then you are a man with a past?"

"Decidedly," he said, and then he added:

"Suppose you try to guess."

"You are not connected with the police?" she queried fearfully.

"Far from it," he returned.

"You are not a burglar?" she demanded.

"No," he answered, "though I do not blame you for thinking so. But I really haven't the nerve. Miss Stryker," he went on, "suppose a man all his life had been honest and decent; suppose he had respected rights of property and tried to treat everybody on the square. Is there anything for such a man to be ashamed of?"

"Why, no," she exclaimed. "Why should there be?"

Again he flushed in that painful, embarrassed way.

"I've tried to be all that, Miss Stryker," he said, "and yet all my life I have been engaged in an occupation that socially would ostracize me. People who knew me would not dare to say they knew me, for their knowledge would have been too likely to come in but one way. People who did not know me, but who knew what I was, would have nothing to do with me. It is only the people who don't know and never can find out, only those who are going to receive me for what I am actually worth. Can't you guess, can't you think, at this moment, of any such strange occupation?"

She was frightened as she looked at him.

"No, I cannot," she exclaimed.

He retreated a step or two and bowed.

"Miss Stryker," he exclaimed, "listen one moment. All my life I have been a pawnbroker."

It was her turn to retreat. His prophecy had been true, the announcement had made her recoil.

"A pawnbroker!" she gasped, growing cold and hot by turns.

"I told you," he said, "what you would think. Have you ever been in a pawnshop, Miss Stryker?"

"No," she began. And then she faltered, "Yes—once."

"In the pawnshop," he exclaimed, "of a man named Snape?"

"Yes," she whispered. "How did you know?"

"I was there," he answered, "when you brought that bracelet in."

"You were there?" she demanded.

"Yes," he said; "I own Snape's shop. I own six others here in town. Miss Stryker," he went on, "I was never cut out to be a pawnbroker; I don't know how I came to be one; I don't know who my father was or who my mother was, but somewhere they had blue blood running in them; I can feel it in my veins. But let me tell you; somehow I worked in a pawnshop years and years ago. One day I owned it and I made money because I got all the trade in the neighborhood. I couldn't cheat people somehow, I couldn't swindle them. It is not a virtue, it was only instinct. I loaned them good money on what they brought in and I charged them reasonable rates. I never knowingly bought a stolen article in all my life, though I know every thief in town. If I got a stolen article I sent it back. I was known as 'Joe Springfield, the square pawnbroker.' The poor people liked me, and somehow I always stayed among them. I got two shops, then three—you can't be in that business, Miss Stryker, without making money hand over fist—and now I've got seven. That's the whole story. I have been a pawnbroker."

Again she repeated that one word:

"Pawnbroker!"

And there still was that note of acute disapproval in her tone.

"You don't seem to think, Miss Stryker, that even a honest pawnbroker is respectable. What do you think of your own father?" he suddenly demanded.

"He is not a pawnbroker," she returned.

Bacheller smiled a grim smile.

"He's worse; he's a note-shaver, a note-broker, Miss Stryker. Where I loaned to the poor who needed money, and did it squarely, your father to-day—I don't mince words—your father trims the well-to-do who need money. He squeezes them to the last drop. That is Colonel Kingman Stryker, and it is true."

It was Colonel Kingman Stryker who at that instant thrust his head in at the door and interrupted, as was his wont. He had heard nothing, but he wanted to say something.

"Come into my den, Bacheller," he said. "You know to-night is the appointed time."

"What appointed time?" asked Bacheller.

"The time," said Colonel Stryker, "that I set this afternoon for you to tell me what to do with that fifty thousand that you gave me."

"I'll tell you," returned Bacheller; "but only in the presence of Miss Evelyn."

Miss Evelyn was ushered into the den and Mr. Bacheller started in. He smiled soberly to himself as he did so.

"Colonel Stryker," he said, "I told you last night that the one thing that the poor wanted was money. There is one thing that lots of other towns have thought of, but your town has not. What do you think of a charity pawnshop?"

"Don't think anything of it," replied Colonel Stryker.

"Oh, yes you do," said Bacheller, "for as long as the poor are with you they must have their pawnshop. There is no comfort on earth like taking a bit of a skirt or a coat or waistcoat, or even a wedding-ring, down to the honest broker and getting money on it. As long as the poor have the pawnshops they will be happy. What I want is to see pawnshops run on the level. I want them run at, say, four per cent. interest and plenty of time to redeem. I want them run right."

"And you want me to run them, do you?" sneered Colonel Stryker. "A charitable pawnshop?"

"No," replied Mr. Benedick Bacheller of the Chatelet Club and of the La Grange, "this is what I was going to propose."

He looked at Miss Evelyn Stryker and actually bestowed upon that young lady a confidential wink.

"Colonel," he said, "I am a man of leisure. I have nothing to do. I have just handed you fifty thousand dollars to start that project on. It's a hobby of mine, but I want your name behind it. Give me back my fifty thousand. Let me run the charity pawnshops."

"Shops!" exclaimed the colonel. "Are you going to establish more than one?"

Mr. Bacheller held his hand in air and brought it firmly down upon the table.

"Colonel Stryker," he said, "give me one year's time; let me pay my own salary out of the profits; give me a good assistant, say, like—well, Richie Stryker, his salary to come out of the profits, and let these pawnshops be known as the Stryker pawnshops, and in one year I will guarantee to have a number of them running in this town."

"How many?" demanded the colonel with his bloodless smile.

B. Bacheller looked over at Evelyn, who sat silently listening to the conversation.

"How many do you say, Miss Stryker?" he asked.

"I say seven," she returned.

"That's a challenge," exclaimed Mr. Bacheller, "and I accept it. Inside of one year I am to have seven pawnshops running here in town, paying their own expenses —making good. Colonel, do you entrust me with this charity?"

"Yes," grunted the colonel; "go ahead, but you'll never make good, my young friend; you don't know anything about pawnshops and you never will."

"I'll know about them in a year from now," replied B. Bacheller, "see if I don't."

It was a year later. It was after dinner at the Stryker homestead, after one of Colonel Stryker's little dinners to the boards of directors of his various charities there in town. The dinner had been extended to Mr. B. Bacheller, one of the fashionable gentlemen of Colonel Stryker's club, in honor of Mr. Bacheller's wonderful success in the colonel's newest charitable venture—the Stryker pawnshops.

Richie Stryker had just slipped on his overcoat to take home his fiancée, Miss Isabel Caruthers, one of the guests of the evening, and their departure had left B. Bacheller and Evelyn alone.

Mr. Bacheller was gazing at something that lay in the hollow of his hand—something that emitted a vivid green light, a light that danced and sparkled.

"Do you know," he said to Evelyn, "I have just been wondering how the Lombard emeralds would go with that fetching gown of yours. Do you mind my trying them?"

Evelyn smiled and flushed prettily.

"I suppose you have the right," she said, as he adjusted them.

"These," he commented, "were actually stolen gems. Lots of people were mixed up with them some years ago, and lots of my suspicious friends have supposed that I, too, was tainted with them, but I bought them outright from the owner after I had succeeded in getting them back for him. That was when I was Joe Springfield."

The girl looked up into his eyes.

"Do you know," she said, "I think I would like to call you Joe."

He held up his hands in horror. "Don't do it," he exclaimed. "Don't do anything that will prevent my being a benedick."

Miss Evelyn Stryker lowered her lashes until her eyes were totally invisible.

"Benedick, the bachelor?" she asked.

## WRECKED ON TOP OF OLD SHIP

BY a strange coincidence, a new $1,000,000 oil tanker which recently came to grief on the breakwater at Tampico, Mexico, was wrecked squarely on the top of another steamer that was lost on the same spot several years ago. So exactly was the new vessel placed over the other, says *Popular Mechanics*, that its boiler room was pierced by the boiler room of the older craft. The wreck occurred when the captain, unable to obtain a local pilot on account of a storm, attempted to enter port on his own calculations. The disaster serves to emphasize the danger of dispensing with the service of a local pilot when entering a harbor. It was estimated at the time of the accident that the new vessel, valued at $1,000,000, would become a total loss. A loss of this kind is keenly felt at this time, as vessels have practically doubled in value since the beginning of the war.

## AGE OF THE OCEANS

STANDING on the shore and looking out over the expanse of water, the ocean seems a fixed and eternal fact, but the seas had a beginning and will have an end. When this time comes the last drop of water will have been absorbed into the earth's crust, its surface will be a desert and all life will become extinct.

The age of the oceans has been estimated by a leading authority, Prof. Frank Clarke of the United States Geological Survey, at about 90,000,000 years. This, of course, is only an approximation, but is based on carefully studied scientific data. All the water was once contained in the vapor that surrounded the glowing, slowly cooling mass which is now the earth. After the gases combined to form water, the process of making the ocean salt began. This was the work of the rivers. Mineral salts were extracted from the rocks over which they flow and deposited in the sea.

Each year the action of the streams makes the ocean slightly more salty and this is the basis on which its age is calculated. The amount of salt carried by the rivers of the world is computed by the scientists and compared with the total quantity in the ocean. After evaporation and the velocity of currents have been considered, it is possible to calculate how long it has taken to make sea water as salt as it is to-day.

About 3½ per cent. of mineral salts and 96½ per cent. fresh water make up the oceans. Three-fourths of the solid matter is common table salt, chloride of sodium, other ingredients being chloride, sulphate and bromide of magnesium; sulphate and carbonate of lime and sulphate of potash, besides traces of various other minerals and metals, including gold and silver. Sea water is not yet a "saturated solution," that is, containing all the salt it will hold in suspension, but when that point is reached the salt will drop to the bottom. The amount is enormous enough, Professor Clarke estimates, to cover the whole United States a mile and a half deep.

The planet Saturn presents the spectacle of a world being made ready to sustain life. All water is still in the form of intensely heated vapor, but as the ages pass it will condense and form oceans and rivers. Long after the earth has become dead and barren a new world, a hundred times greater in bulk, will support plant and animal life, perhaps startlingly different from those we know.

# AN ELEMENTARY CLUE

By CHARLES G. BLANDFORD

JARED VAN SLYCK sat slouched inertly in his chair, watching, as if fascinated, the hands of a busy little desk clock creeping toward the hour of four.

At that hour, the hum and rattle of machinery of the Eclipse Storage Cell Company was to cease.

Day after day, from one of the office windows, he had watched white puffs of steam of an engine exhaust across the broad factory yard and syncronized them with the clinking dollars that were augmenting his private fortune. Now, like a lightning-bolt from a clear sky, had come the change that seemed destined to stop this flow of money and wipe out his remaining fortune as well.

Men shuffled past the cashier's window for their pay in what appeared an endless string, yet he saw them not. The cashier, knowing and sympathizing, placed the proof sheet of his account on the desk of the stricken man and softly tiptoed from the office.

Soon the deadly silence of the room aroused Jared Van Slyck from his lethargy. Again he saw the white puffs of steam across the court, but now they seemed meaningless; yet, hoping against hope, he knew they must be continued unremittingly.

His son's picture, reposing on a silver easel, caught his eye.

"Paul," he murmured brokenly, "that this should happen after all these years; it was yours, my boy, yours——" He took the picture from its easel and gazed hungrily at the face of his boy.

"Will you forgive your old father, Paul?" he asked aloud.

It was a bright and dominating face, this of his son, and he had been a boy to be proud of, and now——

The hum of a motor, coming up the factory driveway toward the office, brought Jared Van Slyck to the realization that it was long past four.

"It is Paul!" he cried, tossing the photograph back in the desk. There sounded quick steps on the office porch and the door flew open. "Paul!" he cried, "you came."

After the first greeting Paul linked his arm affectionately through that of his father.

"Did you think examinations would keep me away when I knew you needed me?" he asked, smiling. "I was on the way an hour after your telegram arrived."

His father patted him approvingly.

"I knew you would come, Paul, but it was imperative. When you hear why I sent for you, you will forgive your old dad, I am sure."

"It is forgiven already, dad," Paul assured him, smiling; "now let us hear what this great business is you have launched since I went West."

While his father talked, Paul listened, smilingly at first, then, as the story progressed, he looked serious.

"You say when this inventor Loebel disappeared he took with him the secrets of his invention?"

His father nodded. "There seemed no haste in having him turn over the process, Paul, for his profits came from sales, and to date he has drawn a small first payment, only enough to furnish the bare necessities of life. Can you conceive of a storage cell, the size of your head, say, capable of running a seven-passenger automobile a thousand miles on one charging?"

Paul smiled with the assurance of one who knows. "Such a thing is beyond the realm of possibility," he declared; "did this old German try to make you believe any such bunk as that?"

His father showed annoyance.

"I was not fool enough to go in this thing without seeing it demonstrated, Paul; what exists cannot be explained away."

"Exists!" cried Paul. A sudden half-formed suspicion shaped itself in his mind that financial reverses had unbalanced that keen brain of his father's. With a glance he noted the finely formed head and the shrewd brown eyes that seemed intensely rational at that moment as they met his.

Jared Van Slyck divined his son's thoughts and smiled. "It isn't that, Paul," he said. "I was never more rational in my life. Come into the laboratory and be convinced."

They passed through the laboratory and stood in a great room, lighted from above by many windows that were lifted part way to permit the escape of pungent gases that permeated the air.

In many porcelain-lined tanks, filled with a dark, bubbling liquid, were hooks of glass, the rod ends of which were immersed. Jared Van Slyck carefully raised one of these glass rods and showed, suspended, a cone-shaped object glistening with small metallic crystals.

Paul nodded comprehendingly. "Electrolysis," he said. "We had it the first year in college."

"Electrolysis, true," agreed his father, "but of a kind you with all your college training never encountered; listen, Paul," continued Jared Van Slyck, "in those tanks, in the course of making, are a half-million dollars' worth of storage cells—sold, mind you, Paul, and paid for. Unless Henry Loebel is brought back here within three days, disintegration will start and they will be a total loss."

"Sold and paid for!" echoed Paul, now thoroughly mystified; "who in heaven's name does business that way, father?"

"All orders from the other side come that way, my boy," explained his father. "This is the first of ten I was expecting to send to the Allies."

The puzzled look disappeared from Paul's face. "A war order!" he cried. "That explains the disappearance of your man; you got him before war was declared on the other side."

"You are wrong; Loebel is a Socialist. He lost two sons in the African service and expatriated himself." Paul appeared to be convinced, yet held to his opinion. The whole thing seemed a hoax, but the puzzling part was, no money had been paid except for buildings and equipment. He stood for a moment silently watching the dancing bubbles in the tank at his feet.

"Why do you continue the current? Arrest the process till we get some sort of line on Loebel."

"That is impossible, for it is a process of time, hours, even minutes; and Loebel alone knows when the cells are to be finished. He has already been away seven days, and some hour of the tenth day is the time. Do not think I have been idle, for even now the police of five cities are secretly working on the case."

"Have you had a demonstration of this cell?" demanded Paul. "I am not convinced yet that you——"

His father raised a hand. "Come and be convinced then."

The laboratory was a room about twenty feet square. In one corner stood a safe. There were tables cluttered with scientific instruments, a work bench, several common wooden chairs and overhead were shafts and pulleys connected with a small lathe, a drill, all evidently drawing power from a small electric motor that stood near the safe. The wires from this motor passed through insulators that were attached to the side of the safe.

Paul noticed all this, but made no comment as his father turned a switch button on the wall. At once all the machines attached to the belts and pulleys began to move. Then the safe door was opened. Paul saw that the motor was being run by a storage cell no larger than a man's head, that was attached to a glass plate in the interior of the safe. With practised eye he estimated the overhead drag of belts and pulleys, noted the perfect insulation of wires and the plate upon which the cell was bolted; there was no chance for fraud. He turned and threw his arms around his father and hugged him enthusiastically.

"It is wonderful!" he cried. "I am convinced, dad, more than convinced; let us get to work at once."

His father led him to a window to the north that overlooked a grassy square between the office and the main group of buildings.

"There are some things here I want explained; for instance, that." He pointed at the top of the window casing, which had been cut away to allow the insertion of a tube-like object made of white porcelain. Paul reached up, found the thing to be loose and removed it.

His eyes opened in amazement, which expression soon changed to one of deep dejection. "To think that another should get this ahead of me," he murmured. Then he pulled himself together. "Just exemplifying that 'there is nothing new under the sun,' dad, that is an accumulator and an exact reproduction of something I invented and hoped some day to make big money with. It is designed to receive a wireless current of electricity and discharge automatically a static spark without wires. It's Loebel's, I suppose; he beat me to it, anyway, and deserves the credit."

"That's the queer thing about it," mused his father. "Loebel never mentioned the thing; in fact, I saw it for the first time yesterday myself."

Paul gazed from the window, from which could be seen a comprehensive view, showing the magnitude of the plant of the Eclipse Storage Cell Company. To the north, topping the great white buildings, was a water tower, standing like a sentinel over the group of buildings and the vast marsh surrounding. On the top of this tower stretched a wireless aerial. Paul looked around inquiringly. "Where is the receiver for your aerial, dad?"

"Aerial!" Mystified, his father looked toward the tower. "By George, Paul, you've got me; I never knew we had an aerial. Guess Loebel and that fellow Deutsch erected it." And Jared Van Slyck sank wearily into a chair.

At the mention of the name of Deutsch Paul started. "What Deutsch was it? What was his first name?" he asked eagerly.

"I don't know; he was one of Loebel's countrymen, an electrician."

"It wasn't Otto Deutsch, was it?" persisted Paul.

His father's face brightened. "I believe that was the name; why?"

"Otto Deutsch! Do you mean to tell me you don't know of Otto Deutsch, the great inventor?" cried Paul. "Why, he is the talk of all Europe."

His father shook his head. "Never heard of him before. Was to have met him the morning we got stalled. That was a queer thing, Paul. That morning we met no less than a dozen machines the first mile out from Newark, all stalled with ignition trouble and all headed for Jersey City; then we got hung up ourselves. There was quite an account of it in the papers next morning; they blamed the trolley wires. Our coil and magneto were both burned out and it looked as if some outside disturbance must have caused it—why, you're pale, my boy! What's the matter?"

Paul smiled wanly.

"It's nothing," he assured his father. "Tell me this, though, dad; did you pass a motor car at about the time your car stalled?"

Jared Van Slyck thought for a moment and nodded. "I think we did; I know we did, in fact, a long, yellow runabout, for I spoke to the chauffeur about their accursed horn; it would deafen one and we were well off to the right when they blew."

Paul drooped his shoulders with an air of dejection. It was a warm day in June. Through the window, that had been left open, came the busy hum of motor vehicles on the highway, rushing across the great artery that connected Newark with Jersey City. Both sat silent for a moment, when suddenly, from somewhere near, came the vibrant screech of an electric horn. It was a disagreeable, rasping and penetrating sound that brought both father and son to their feet. Paul looked at his father inquiringly, then toward the little motor in the corner from which came a crackling sound, and wisps of smoke were arising from it.

"That's it, Paul! That's the same horn, and there goes the yellow runabout," he said, pointing from the window.

Paul ran to the window, but was too late for more than a fleeting glimpse of the car as it shot out toward the highway.

At that moment footsteps could be heard coming rapidly through the corridor. The electrician and his fireman, the only men left in the works, burst into the room; Smith, the electrician, was in front.

"The dynamos, sir!" he cried breathlessly; "they just ripped wide open."

Jared Van Slyck groaned. "Both of them, Smith?" he asked. "Is the current stopped?"

The man nodded. "Dead," he answered laconically. "I tried to cut in the other pair and found the brushes tampered with."

He motioned to the fireman.

"Tell them what you saw, Jerry."

Jerry, plainly embarrassed, glanced from father to son. "I'll tell, but they'll think me dippy. I was a-lookin' out of the window watchin' them autymobiles shootin' by when all of a sudden a long, yellow one ran off the road and came tearin' over the lawn toward the engine-house. I thought first it was an accident, but it kept a-comin' right over to the window where I stood. There was two men in it, and when it stopped one of the fellows stooped over and pressed something that blew a horn. It made a divil of a racket, sir, an' I was about to open a window to see what they was a-wantin', when I heard Mr. Smith holler an' looked to see a streak of fire shootin' over my head. There came a cracklin' from the dynamos an' all of a sudden they went dead."

Paul laughed grimly at the recital. "Draw your fires, Jerry," he ordered; "we won't need them again." He turned to his father.

"Let them stay on, dad, till we get this thing settled; they can alternate night and day as watchmen."

His father, though mystified, nodded consent.

Back in the office, Paul drew a memorandum-book from

his pocket and thumbed through some finely written pages. "Read that, dad, and then I'll tell you of a scheme I have in mind to make some one pay the loss we have showing here and a neat little profit besides."

His father read the notations with casual interest at first, then evidenced strong excitement.

"By George!" he exclaimed, "it is incredible; the whole thing sounds like a page from the Black Arts."

"It is true, nevertheless, and Deutsch had made practical what I knew in theory. Electricity is accepted as an unknown product of friction; a power without definition. We of the later school know it is a series of intensified rays embracing a thousand or more colors beyond the violet. What Deutsch accomplished here follows all accepted fundamentals. With his intensifier he projected clarified rays. These rays, having an affinity for common electricity, followed the line of resistance to the dynamos, the wrappings of which, unable to carry the load, burst, the same as a water-pipe will when subjected to too much pressure."

His father began to comprehend. "And the cars? You think, then, that the snuffing-out that morning of that string of cars, of which we were unluckily one, was in line with some of Deutsch's experiments?"

Paul shook his head. "Mr. Deutsch was after you that morning, dad; he wanted to delay your arrival and found it necessary, on account of their speed, to get every car coming from the direction of Newark."

*"This is what old Loebel dropped when the other fellow yanked him out of the chair."*

Jared Van Slyck rubbed his forehead thoughtfully. "In which he displayed devilish little regard for the comfort of others," he said.

"Little deference should be paid such a man," commented Paul. "Now, here's my theory; Deutsch has in some way gotten a line on this discovery of Loebel's. Spies have discovered you are about to manufacture for the Allies, and Deutsch, with the aid of scientific knowledge he possesses, starts first to ruin you. This has been accomplished. In the meanwhile Loebel has been spirited away. We will assume this, as he had turned against his home country and taken citizenship here. That Deutsch is a very wealthy man is well known; he, therefore, is not working for money. It is evident, then, some powerful influence back of him want this storage cell and will proceed to any end to obtain it—do you follow me, dad?"

His father nodded. "Go on, Paul," he urged enthusiastically. "I believe you are on the right track."

Paul looked thoughtful, then indicated the small porcelain tube that had been placed back in the window-casing where it had been found.

"That accumulator and the wireless aerial on the water-tank are yet to be explained. I am satisfied, though, they are some part of Deutsch's elaborate scheme, and if we get to the bottom of all this we will run into an international complication. In any event, Loebel is lost to us, and the ones responsible must be made to pay."

Outside they found the burly fireman on guard. "Have you a gun?" asked Paul, as Jerry came up the porch stairs.

Jerry patted his hip-pocket with his hand suggestively. "The best in the world, sir; a 38 automatic."

"Good! Stick around the front here the best part of the time and, if you have occasion, use it."

And they went whirling toward Newark, whose electric lights in the distance were ever now, sparkling in the heavy June air.

Nine o'clock next morning saw them back at the works ready to begin investigations.

Jerry was on the office porch grinning grotesquely as they drove up. He appeared excited.

"They was here all right last night, an' they didn't git away with anything, neither," he called to them.

"Who were here, Jerry?" asked Paul, running up the steps, eager to hear the news.

"It was Loebel and the tall guy that came to see him last week. I seen them as plain as day, Mr. Van Slyck, and I'd swear it was the same fellow who drove in here with the yellow car yesterday."

Paul glanced at his father and nodded. "They were after the storage cell, father; with that out of our hands they would have——"

"Would you come in here a minute?" called Jerry, who had preceded them to the laboratory and stood glancing at an object in the overturned waste-barrel.

The laboratory showed signs of a violent scuffle. Chairs were overturned, also the iron waste-barrel and a large working-table had been shoved against the wall, upsetting its contents. After a comprehensive glance at the wreck, Paul turned to Jerry inquiringly.

"It happened while I was on me two o'clock trip through the works," the man explained. "It takes a good

half-hour to make the round, and when I come back I heard a snappin' and saw flashes like a short-circuit here in the laboratory. I rushed in, and who should I see but old Loebel sittin' quiet over there in that chair, with his hands in his lap, I thought first, but then I saw he was a-holdin' something. The big guy was makin' so much fuss with an electric drill he couldn't hear me. I suppose I was foolish not to pull me gun, Mr. Van Slyck," continued Jerry apologetically, "but the tall man looked dead easy, and there's where I made a mistake." Jerry rubbed his jaw reminiscently. "I grabbed him from behind, meanin' to floor him, but, like a cat, he turned, sir, and belted me one on the jaw. Down I went, takin' with me the wire cable he held and the drill—there's the drill where it fell—and then the place went dark. Now, here's the funny thing about it all, and I'm not askin' you to believe it. I've worked in power-houses all me life and never saw the beat of what took place in this room." Jerry paused, moistened his lips and looked from one to the other for encouragement. "As there's a God in heaven, while I lay there on me back I saw a stream of juice racing from that window there, clean across the room to where old Loebel had sat without moving through the whole business. First I thought I was seeing things from the whack I got, but as me head cleared I could see the Dutchman was holdin' something in his lap and the other fellow was shakin' him and trying to get him out of the chair. I made a jump for the big guy again. 'You'll not get away this time, me bucko,' I yelled, and then"—Jerry looked down at the tangle of wire cluttering the floor, then aimed a vicious kick in their direction—"the damned wires floored me again; by the time I kicked loose they had beat it." Jerry reached in the overturned waste-barrel and drew gingerly forth a strange-looking object. "This is what old Loebel dropped when the other fellow yanked him out of the chair."

It was a small machine of heavy, compact build and seemed an exquisite piece of workmanship. There was a mass of wheels and cogs, surrounding a covered drum. Two metal handles extended from the front of the thing, over which was set a tiny dial. On either side of the dial were two slender rods tipped with small black knobs that gave it the appearance of the antennæ of a gigantic beetle.

Paul and his father examined the thing curiously. "What do you make of it, Paul?" asked his father, watching as Paul began cautiously moving the levers of the thing.

"Blest if I know—ah! the wheels are revolving." This had happened as an outward pressure was exerted. Paul increased the pressure and there came a droning, buzzing sound, followed instantly by the resounding snap of an electric spark, that came arching from the accumulator in the window across the room.

Paul jumped. "That was a nasty one," he said with a grimace. Then came other discharges, increasing rapidly, so that a continuous stream was formed, forking through the air, to the black antennæ of the machine.

With body racked and muscles twisted. Paul withstood the grueling current as long as he could, then essayed to let go.

"I can't drop the thing!" he cried, with voice shrilling unnaturally. "Quick, the accumulator!"

His father, with rare presence of mind, comprehended. He grabbed a heavy iron pestle from the floor and, with one blow, knocked the little tube clear of the window casing. This broke connection from outside and the current ceased, and Paul, with muscles relaxed, slid unconscious to the floor.

Alarmed, his father raised him and, with the help of Jerry, who till now had stood dazedly looking on, they chafed and pummeled Paul vigorously, who soon showed signs of returning consciousness.

He opened his eyes, smiled and struggled weakly to his feet.

"That's a corker, dad, and no mistake," he declared, spurning with his foot, as if it were a snake, the wonderful bit of mechanism that lay on the floor where it had fallen.

"Sure, I thought you was done for that time, Mr. Van Slyck," said Larry, picking up the offending machine and gazing at it admiringly. "I've seen all sorts of cuttin' up of electricity when lightning gits on the wires in a power-house, but this little contrivance has it stopped for jumpin' gaps—near twenty feet," he added, measuring the distance with his eye.

"What do you make of it, Paul?" asked his father, who seemed unable to entirely regain his composure after his son's late experience. "I confess to sort of a 'gone' feeling in the pit of my stomach, as if we were tackling something of a supernatural order and getting worsted."

Paul looked thoughtful.

"Did you ever hear of an invention of Lachino, the Italian inventor, called an oscillator, a contrivance designed to generate and project benign electric rays? I didn't suppose you had, for we only lately had a paper on them at college—that's what I was getting a skin full of a few minutes ago, dad, Lachino's 'benign' rays. They came from the aerial over there and discharged through the accumulator to this machine. I should call 'benign' a misnomer."

His father agreed with him.

"But your experience just now, Paul?" inquired Jared Van Slyck; "what is the secret of this devilish power?"

"I was coming to that," explained Paul. "This little machine is designed to produce hypnosis."

"Ah!" ejaculated his father, "now I begin to see how they got Loebel. So, Paul, my faith in Henry Loebel was not misplaced after all."

"Every person has a different electrical resistance," continued Paul, not heeding the interruption. "The machine was set to overcome and subject the resistance of Loebel. The instant the current reached the height of my resistance I was for the moment dominated by a master influence. I heard the sounds made by the machinery in the shop where that electricity was being generated and I heard voices. Why," continued Paul, waxing enthusiastic over the wonder of it, "I really believe I would recognize those voices were I to hear them again."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed his father incredulously. "You were dreaming, Paul; such a thing could——"

"It isn't nonsense," declared Paul vehemently. "A voice said, speaking in German, 'Some one has found the machine; they are drawing power,' then the current became stronger and I was rendered unconscious."

"The thing seems beyond the realm of possibility," protested his father, "yet, if you are right, we must act at once if anything is to be accomplished. What do you suggest?"

"That we start on a hunt for Deutsch and his workshop. Once we have him, a case can easily be established. His associates will no doubt want to be kept in the background and would pay handsomely to be left there. I hold a trump card, dad," declared Paul jubilantly, "one that is already causing considerable worriment in a certain foreign Embassy, I've no doubt."

His father smiled at his assurance. "I shan't be inquisitive, Paul; when you play it, it will be time enough for me to know."

It was decided to start for Newark at once. From

Jerry they found that the motor used by Deutsch bore a New Jersey license, so, with this to guide them, little trouble was anticipated in running down Deutsch and his co-conspirators. The balance of that day was spent in a systematic search of Newark garages, and at nightfall their search was rewarded. Jared Van Slyck identified the car among twenty, under the glare of arc lights in a big garage on the outskirts of Newark. It was the same big yellow runabout, but had been turned in permanently by its former lessees, who had left no address. Paul lifted the hood and showed where the intensifier had been installed on special brackets. The garage people acknowledged installing the contrivance, but professed ignorance as to its use.

That the finding of the car gave no clue to the whereabouts of Deutsch was keenly disappointing to father and son. It was certain now their quarry were preparing to depart. So on the way home a plan of action was mapped out for the following day.

"We still have the little machine they left at the works," reminded Paul; "if it weren't for the delay, that would be the means of furnishing us the desired information."

His father raised his hand in solemn protest.

"No, Paul, not for many times what there is at stake shall you subject yourself again to the power of that machine."

"Nor for the treasures of the Incas," supplemented Paul, laughing. "I quite agree with you, dad; one dose of Lachino's benign electricity is quite enough," and he stretched his muscles unconsciously in recollection of the deadly grip of the little machine.

Next morning a further disappointment was to be met with. At the works they found the enemy had made another nocturnal visit. Jerry was found on the floor of the laboratory, trussed like a pig and fairly foaming at the mouth with rage. He had been caught unawares, and after a valiant fight had succumbed to odds of three to one.

Paul groaned in disappointment. Things seemed to be all against them. He had noted in examining the machine, the da ybefore, that Zenolite, a new fibre insulating material, had been employed in its manufacture. This material came in numbered sheets and could be obtained only direct from the manufacturer, and it happened Deutsch had used the very part that was numbered. Knowing this number, Paul had but to write to the manufacturers of Zenolite to find the purchaser of that particular sheet; but, alas, he had failed to take down the number.

"If you could only have kept the machine away from them, Jerry," lamented Paul.

"It was the domned machine they was after, sir," explained the man, rubbing a great bump on the side of his head. "Right well I knew that, for it was only when I made a jump and grabbed it out of the Dutchman's hand that they——"

His recital was interrupted by a violent ringing of the telephone bell.

Paul took down the receiver.

"No, this is Jared Van Slyck's son," he answered the voice at the other end. "You may give me the message; my father is here."

"I just wanted to thank you for the machine we were obliged to take by force last night," said the voice. "Do not blame your watchman; he made a good fight against odds."

"Thank you, Herr Otto Deutsch, for my father; he hopes we may soon meet."

"Potztausand!" came in a surprised voice from the other end of the wire, and a click showed he had hung up.

"Deutsch?" interrogated his father.

Paul nodded. "That's what I call consummate nerve, dad, to think we wouldn't know Jerry put up a good scrap He just wanted to find out if we were on the job yet; that's why he called up."

"Did he say anything about the piece I broke off the contrapshun?" asked Jerry, grinning. He produced from a pocket one of the small, black electrodes attached to a bit of twisted steel rod. "It's as heavy as lead, sir," he said, handing it over.

Paul examined the tiny ball curiously and tested its weight in the hollow of his hand.

"It's very heavy," he commented. "Osmium, I think, and if it is osmium——" He turned to his father, who saw Paul was laboring under strong excitement. "Are you hooked up to the city current here, dad?" he asked eagerly. His father nodded, and Jerry, who knew, went quickly across the room and threw in a switch.

With the aid of a file Paul obtained some particles of metal from the electrode, snapped the current on a tiny electric forge and subjected the filings to the spitting glow of the forge. In a moment a disagreeable odor arose from the burning metal.

"Smell it, dad?" cried Paul triumphantly. "It's osmium!"

That afternoon Paul and his father, with Jerry and two plain-clothes men from Newark Police Headquarters, alighted from their car at a point a block away from one of several tumble-down buildings in the factory district of Newark.

Save for the antennæ that showed a wireless station to be hidden somewhere underneath, one would have thought the building unoccupied. As the party proceeded along the narrow, roughly cobbled street past the rookery, they could see, through broken windows and doors, the littered, rotting floors that showed many years of abandonment.

At the rear of the building, though, this illusion was dissipated, for a well-defined path, leading from the direction of the city to a stout battened door recently fitted, showed much use.

"Do you want us to bust it, sir?" asked Jerry, keen to encounter again the man who had twice bested him.

Paul shook his head and imposed silence with a warning finger. A new board lay as if carelessly flung in front of the door-sill. On hands and knees Paul examined it, and found, as he expected, connecting wires that would have formed a circuit had one trod on the board, and no doubt alarmed those inside. He cut one of these wires, and then, with the aid of a small saw obtained from the car, a half-circle was sawed around the door lock and they were free to enter the outer shell of the building.

Fearful that Deutsch and his fellow plotters might have some secret mode of egress, Paul stationed an officer at either end of the rookery, then prepared to enter. Paul, though unarmed, chose to lead, then came Jerry with an automatic in hand ready for use, and, lastly, Jared Van Slyck. Inside, in the half-light, they found themselves in what had been a casting room. Piles of rotted core boxes and other débris littered the loamy carpet underfoot and showed many years of disuse. Paul flashed the light of a small pocket-torch ahead and revealed a well-trodden path stretching ahead in the gloom. This they followed single file for about fifty feet and came suddenly upon a partition painted black in which was another door. Listening, they could hear the hum of a dynamo and tapping of hammers. Paul cautiously turned the handle of the door and found it unlocked.

"Ready, now," he whispered. "In we go."

The door was flung open and they stood in the glare of a long and well-lighted room. Consternation reigned for a moment. Deutsch was there working busily away with a file; he turned and in an stant grasped the situation. He would have drawn a weapon, but Jerry saw the move and covered him with the automatic.

"Hands away from your pockets there, me bucko!" he warned. "I have ye now, and if ye try any monkey-business, it's a 38 I'll be lettin' through ye."

A big bulk of a man with a great spread-eagle mustache, who had been writing at a desk, wheeled in his chair and frowned at the intruders. Down the room, a half-dozen workmen at various machines suspended work and looked toward Otto Deutsch inquiringly. Lastly Paul saw Henry Loebel. He sat at the base of a great whirring wheel at the farther end of the room, busily tinkering with a cone-shaped object. He, of all in the workshop, seemed to be unconscious of the presence of the visitors.

"There's Henry Loebel," whispered Jared Van Slyck, plucking Paul by the sleeve. Paul nodded, fixing his eyes on Deutsch, who seemed ill at ease.

"We've found you, Herr Otto Deutsch," said Paul, smiling grimly. Deutsch, who was fast gaining composure, shrugged his sinewy shoulders deprecatingly.

"My congratulations, if they will do you any good; yet," and he turned toward the man at the desk, as if to include him, "we are at a loss to understand the reason for this intrusion."

Jared Van Slyck, who till now had stayed in the background, allowing Paul full sway in unraveling the mystery of the disappearance of Henry Loebel, could contain himself no longer.

"You are at a loss!" he cried. "You, who have ruined me financially, taken Henry Loebel away and twice entered my works forcibly, are at a loss? Let me assure you of this one thing, Mr. Deutsch, before we're through with you, you'll wish you had left our affairs religiously alone."

"We merely recovered our property, Mr. Van Slyck; you may have yours now that you have come for it. There is Loebel; take him," said Deutsch.

The big man at the desk arose abruptly.

"Why all this mummery, Otto?" he asked testily. "We know nothing of their affairs; if they want Loebel, remove the influence and let him go."

Deutsch bowed in acquiescence. "As you say, colonel. Heinrich!" he called. One of the workmen left his bench and came up the room, standing at attention before Otto Deutsch.

"*Schliess es ab*" (shut off the current), he ordered.

There came the snap of a switch and the room was thrown into utter darkness.

Then came a hubbub of sounds. Paul had the presence of mind to jump to his father's side.

"It is I, dad," he whispered. "Hold tightly to my arm till we locate Jerry. Jerry, where are you?"

"Here by the door," came Jerry's reassuring voice back of them; "none has gone out, sir, and I have me finger on the gun for the first one who tackles me."

"Good for you, Jerry," said Paul at Jerry's elbow; "father and I are here. Let us through and hold the doorway till we return."

"They'll only go through over me dead body," assured the faithful fellow stoutly.

Paul and his father hurried around to the front to find, as they expected, Deutsch and his companion in the toils, they having been caught by the vigilant police coming out by another passage.

Deutsch was furious at his detention, and espying Paul transferred his flood of wrath.

"Do you know what you are doing?" he demanded, sputtering grotesquely in a mixture of languages in his excitement.

"Perfectly," replied Paul coolly; "protecting my rights as an American citizen."

"Bah!" ejaculated Deutsch in disgust. "That for your American citizenship!" and he snapped his fingers derisively.

Paul was losing patience. "Before you are through with us and the Federal authorities, Herr Deutsch, you will have a more wholesome respect for the laws of the United States," he retorted.

The other, who seemed till now to wish to keep in the background, stepped forward. One of the officers had tight hold of his arm, but at a motion from Paul he relinquished his grip.

The man bowed his thanks.

"Just what do you propose to do, Mr. Van Slyck?" he demanded with the air of one used to being in authority.

"In the first place," answered Paul, "you two are to be remanded before the Federal Court; as for Herr Deutsch, we have him on several counts. A John Doe warrant was necessary in your case."

Deutsch shook a fist at his young antagonist. "You may take me," he shouted, "but never Count Von——"

"Otto!" warned his companion.

Paul laughed. "He has revealed nothing, Count Von Betelmann; I have been aware of your identity from the first."

The other shrugged his shoulder resignedly.

"You are remarkable for so young a man," he declared, regarding Paul with undisguised admiration; "in what way have you connected me with your misfortunes?"

Paul produced from his vest-pocket a glittering bauble. "You have no doubt wondered where you lost this, Herr Von Betelmann. I happened upon your advertisement in the New York papers this morning."

"My decoration!" exclaimed Von Betelmann, extending his hand.

Paul replaced it in his pocket. "I will keep it for the present, if you do not mind," he said, smiling; "you see, I found this on the floor of our laboratory."

Von Betelmann turned to Deutsch, who was following the conversation closely.

"We are beaten, Otto; if we resist it will cause an international mess." He turned and regarded Paul closely. "We capitulate, young man," he said finally; "name your terms."

Later, in a private room of a great Metropolitan bank, the amount claimed was paid over in full to Paul and his father.

"It is a lot of money," said Von Betelman, smiling; "though we did not succeed in obtaining this wonderful little cell for our own use, at least we spoiled it for the Allies."

Deutsch had sat glowering off in a corner of the room while the money was being transferred; now he aroused himself.

"Tell me, if you will, Herr Van Slyck, how you located our little workshop?"

"There is little of the metal osmium used in this country," replied Paul; "the electrode that was broken from your wonderful little machine turned out to be of that metal, and I happened to know Schlimmer & Company of New York to be sole dealers in osmium. They were kind enough to furnish us with your address."

"You found us none too soon," commented Count Von Betelmann. "We sail for home by the Holland Line tomorrow."

# THE JEWELED DAGGER

BY RICHARD STILLMAN POWELL.

AS I had expected, the cellar door was unlatched. I have found that I can nearly always rely upon the inherent carelessness of servants for such favors as an unlocked door or an open window.

Pushing open the door, I descended three stone steps and gained the basement floor. I had brought no lantern with me, since I did not anticipate requiring the services of one. Three days previously I had, while ostensibly reading the gas meter, familiarized myself with the house from the cellar to the second floor; and so departed openly, making memoranda in a notebook, presumably as to the amount of gas consumed during the last month, in reality of such facts of interest as the positions of exits from the second story, the number of steps in the rear and front staircases, the location of creaky boards in the flooring and other like items of more or less value to a gentleman anticipating a visit under cover of darkness to a residence with a view to relieving the occupants of a surplus of jewelry and silverware.

*I thrust my right arm forward, and as hers struck it the dagger dropped harmlessly from her hand.*

To-night the first difficulty confronted me at the head of the stairs, leading to the rear hall from the basement; the door was locked. It proved but child's play, however, to pick the ordinary cast-iron lock and so reach the ground floor. The lights in that part of the house were out and the servants asleep, presumably, in their rooms above. A swinging door, containing a pane of glass set in it at a level with my shoulder, opened into the front hall. Through it I saw that the light on the newel post, at the foot of the broad staircase, was burning dimly; a precautionary measure against fire, evidently, since I was well aware that all of the family were in their rooms; and a light in the front hall was scarcely a necessity if one of the servants was still to come home. The occupants of the house were but six in number, and consisted of the master, Joseph Lodge, a wealthy and liberal manufacturer; his wife, a charming woman, so report had it, whom I had not had the pleasure of meeting, and the servants. Of the latter there were but four, a cook, three maids, and a youth of twenty-two, who attended to the furnace, looked after the one horse belonging to the family, and created more or less havoc in the small park surrounding the house, in the intervals between his other duties. From the vantage of a large shrub, only a few yards from the hall door, I had seen the master and his wife return from the city in the carriage at half-past eleven, alight and enter the house. Later I had seen lights in the two front rooms of the second story, and later still, at about twelve, I had seen the lights go out. I had kept my post until a quarter before one, and as up to that time no one had left the building by either of the front or side doors, I felt very certain of finding Mr. and Mrs. Lodge in their rooms, but whether asleep or awake remained to be determined; so I resolved to use the utmost caution.

Gentlemen of my profession have a natural antipathy toward light while following their vocation, and I am no exception to the rule. Nevertheless, on this occasion I decided to use the front stairs, rather than those at the rear of the house, to gain the floor above. For this there were two excellent reasons. In the first place the back stairs led directly to the door of the room occupied by the two maids, and in order to reach the front of the house it was necessary to undergo the risk of awaking

these damsels from their slumbers, and as I had learned from experience that servant girls were extremely nervously constituted beings, I had small relish for the risk. In the second place, that route was much less direct than the one before me, since the front flight made a turn at a landing half-way up its length, and came to an end directly before the room occupied by the master of the house, which room I considered the base of operations.

So, with a glance of suspicious enmity at the low-burning gas-jet, I started up the broad staircase, stooping low and steadying myself with my hands on the steps above. At the sixth step I paused and listened attentively. I heard no sound save the loud ticking of a clock somewhere near by, and the howl of a dog a mile or so off in the darkness. Well content, I started forward again, when a quick, shrill shriek sent my heart leaping into my throat, and caused me to clutch the banisters in fear and trembling.

My first thought was of a burglar alarm; then my nerves quieted down, and I realized the meaning of the sound; it was a cuckoo clock hanging on the landing above me. It had struck one o'clock. I crouched down in the shadow of the banisters and looked at my watch. The infernal clock was ten minutes slow. Why, I marveled, did people give house room to such terrible, inaccurate contrivances? With my nerves somewhat unsettled, I crept on again past the cursed clock, and so reached the head of the stairs.

All was darkness. To the right of me another flight of stairs led on up to the third story, where in the front of the house was situated a billiard-room, and in the back a garret. With these rooms I had nothing to do, so I turned my attention to Mrs. Lodge's room. From this no light shone anywhere, neither through the key-hole nor from under the door. I stooped and laid a practised ear at the key-hole; not a sound reached it. I turned to the door opposite. Here, as there, shone no sign of light, but I heard distinctly from within the sound of snoring. I tried the handle. Eureka! I was in luck; the door opened. Pushing it gently in, I crept through and closed it again, all but a few inches.

Crossing the room, with a glance at the bed and its inmate, I reached the window on the side of the house, and, undoing the fastening, raised the sash a few inches to make sure that egress, in case of hurried flight, was possible there. Heavy curtains draped the window at each side. Behind one of these curtains I stepped and looked out.

Below me was the park; beyond that the road, with a few scattered residences in sight. The night was cloudy, but not perfectly dark. There was even a prospect of moonlight later on, for even now the moon was struggling with the black clouds overhead. I prayed for another hour of darkness, and turned again to the room.

The bed, with its sleeping occupant, was plainly discernible, a great blotch of gray in the half light. Beyond the bed was, I surmised, a bureau. I could see no sign of a closet in the room, but a door near at hand opened into a dressing-room, where, since it was lighted by a window on the side of the house, I could plainly make out the forms of a stationary wash-bowl, a shaving stand, a chair or two, and what, on investigation, proved to be a closet door.

I had reason to believe that under the foot of the bed I should find a basket containing the table silver of the house, and on running my hand along the floor thereabouts I was not disappointed. The basket appeared to be nearly full of knives, forks and such like utensils. But I left it in its place for the present, as I wished first to examine Mrs. Lodge's jewelry case, which I had been informed contained some few diamonds really meriting the attention of such an experienced collector as myself.

The ticking of a watch attracted my attention, and I soon located it on the top of the shaving stand in the dressing-room. From the feel of it, it appeared to be an ordinary enough gold time-piece, with some inscription on the back, and so, perhaps, scarcely worth the trouble of disposing of it. Still, business had not been particularly flourishing with me of late, so I dropped the watch into my pocket, resolving not to be too nice in my tastes for the present. At that moment a slight sound fell on my ears. I paused and waited, but heard nothing more. Then I looked carefully around the corner of the doorway. I could see nothing to account for the noise. The sleeper lay in the same position and snored quietly. I advanced into the room, keeping well in the shadow. Everything was as before. Stay! Surely there lay a faint line of light under the door across the hall. I stole to the door of the room, and increased its opening sufficiently to allow my eyes a fair view of the one opposite. There was a light in the woman's room, which had not been there when I looked before. It was not strong, and I surmised that she had lighted a night lamp—which would also account for the small noise I had heard. Hesitating whether to remain where I was or to retreat to the convenient darkness of the rear hall, I listened for sounds from the room. Presently they reached me—the sounds of footsteps! And coming toward the door!

Even as I drew myself together for a retreat the light under the door increased in brilliancy, and then suddenly the door was opened and I caught a glimpse, ere I abandoned my position, of a woman in a light colored gown holding a night lamp in one hand. Quickly and noiselessly I drew down the shade of the front window and stepped back of one of the draperies. I preferred to be there rather than in the dressing-room, in case of discovery, since in the latter place I should be cut off from retreat save by way of the window, which I had neglected to examine; I had learned long before never to trust my fortunes to a strange window.

Scarcely had I gained my hiding-place when the door of the room was opened, the woman entered, and the door was closed again and locked. I cursed her heartily for a meddling fool, while observing with relief that she had left the key in the lock. She passed where I stood, and I was obliged to draw back, and so lost sight of her for a moment.

When I looked forth again she was at the side window. Putting aside the draperies, she raised the lower sash to its full limit. I thanked her fervently for that; I preferred, when hurried, a window to a door, and with this one wide open a leap to the ground was no trick at all. She stood looking out for nearly a minute, as I had done shortly before. Then she turned and came back to the foot of the bed opposite to where I stood concealed, and I held my breath lest she should hear the sound of my breathing. Once she started toward me, possibly to put up that window also, but changing her mind, went to the bed and examined the sleeping man, holding the lamp over his face. His low, regular respiration seemed to satisfy her, for I heard a sigh of evident relief as she placed the lamp on a chair and let her gaze travel about the room.

As she stood there, I found my first good opportunity for observing her. She appeared to be about thirty years of age, tall, erect and with a superb carriage of the head. Her gown revealed in its clinging folds a perfect form. Her hair, black and lustrous, hung unconfined over her broad, white shoulders, and her face—but as I looked at her face my heart stopped its beating for an instant. She

was undeniably handsome, with regular features and deep-set, dark eyes, but on her face was such a terrible, inhuman look of repressed agony and dread that for the moment I thought her insane. Her next actions were but little conducive to a change of opinion.

With a shrug of her shoulders, as though throwing off some qualm of an opposing conscience, she crossed the apartment to the side window, and pulling softly at one of the draperies, soon tore it from its fastenings. This she laid on a chair. Then she took from the pocket of her gown a tiny phial and a cloth. Again she approached the sleeping man and bent over him; he stirred uneasily in his slumber, and I saw her hand cross to her bosom and linger there until his breathing became regular again.

It must not be supposed that my thoughts had been idle during these operations. At first the idea of flight came to me, and I considered the possibilities of a successful leave-taking by way of the door. But presently curiosity held me captive and I realized, as I read the woman's face, that soon, unless fate interposed, a deed darker than that contemplated by me would be perpetrated. For a while my nerves had played me false, but when I realized that murder was to be done, unless I speedily thought of a way of preventing it, my ordinary composure returned and I set my mind busily to work.

Quickly, but carefully, she applied a portion of the contents of the phial to the cloth and laid it over the sleeper's face; in a moment the sweet and nauseous fumes of chloroform filled the room. The threatened man stirred not. Laying down the phial, after replacing the stopple, the woman seized the drapery from the chair and tore off about a yard of its length. Again she approached the bed; turning down the bed-clothes and undoing his night-gown, she laid her hand over the man's heart. Already I could perceive a difference in his breathing; the drug was taking effect. I have had some experience with chloroform, and I knew that the quantity already administered would produce no worse effect than a severe headache on waking. But the drug, I was sure, was but the first step; the real drama was yet to play.

The woman's hand traveled slowly over the bared breast; the other hand went to her bosom; this one I watched. In a moment she had found the place to strike; in another moment the hand at her bosom fell to her side. It was her left hand and I could not see it. She leaned silently over the bed and listened intently. The house was still. I held my breath; my mind was already made up, and I only waited the moment to act. Already her hands drew together, when again that cursed clock on the landing below shrieked out the hour! I started violently and the curtain folds undulated. I feared to look out lest she had seen it. Again the clock shrieked. Two o'clock.

I gathered my nerves in hand and peered out. The woman was on the floor; the hand clutching at her heart held a jeweled dagger such as women wear in the hair; plainly could I hear her labored breathing; she, too, had been startled by the sounds. For a moment or two she sat there motionless, leaning against the foot of the bed. Then she arose. The dagger was clutched in her right hand now; with the left she sought the opening between the ribs over the heart of the unconscious victim. She raised the knife; three blood-red gems in the hilt sparkled wickedly in the light. Slowly she lowered it until the point touched the man's breast over his heart. Again, and carefully, she raised the dagger.

Her back was towards me and I could not see her face, for which I was rather thankful; it could not have been, just at that moment, a pleasant one to look upon. The upraised hand never trembled as it poised to strike. I thrust the drapery noiselessly aside and stole forward just as a loud hiss burst from her lips and the knife swiftly descended. But I had thrust my right arm forward, and as hers struck it the dagger dropped harmlessly from her hand and fell to the man's naked breast.

She uttered no sound but, while I might have counted ten, stood erect and rigid. Such moments as those kill, and I, in turn, gave a sigh of relief when she fell quietly back against me in a swoon. I half dragged and half carried her to the nearest chair, where she lay inert and lifeless, while I went back to the bed and examined the saturated cloth over the man's face.

As I had thought, the amount of chloroform inhaled was too small to do more than produce profound slumber, so I replaced the cloth lest the sleeper should throw off the effect and awake before my visit was over. The dagger I picked up and examined. It was of foreign workmanship. Six large rubies adorned the hilt, and despite that the thing was intended to serve only as an ornament, the steel was of such quality that I could not bend the blade from shape. Had it struck a rib the man's life would not have been spared through the intervention of a bent blade. It was a pretty thing, and I dropped it into a pocket after the watch; then I unlocked the door and peered out, listening carefully for sounds of persons moving in the house. All was silent. Our litte drama had passed off unheard.

I closed and locked the door again, and seated myself on the edge of the bed facing the unconscious woman, and filled my pipe and lighted it. The odor of the chloroform was still sickening, although the opened window had done much to dissipate it. For several minutes I sat there and thought, watching the smoke clouds float upwards, and keeping an eye on my fair neighbor. Then I went to the window, and knocking the ashes out against the sill, placed my pipe back in my pocket, and drew a chair to the small table which stood against the wall. I had a pencil in my pocket, but I preferred to use a fly-leaf from a book lying at my elbow, than to tear a page from the little memorandum which I carried.

"Take a burglar's advice; never sleep again with your door unlocked; danger threatens from within."

I folded the message, and, searching under the clothes, placed it firmly in the sleeper's hand. Then I turned again to the woman. A faint color had returned to her cheeks, and an instant later her eyes opened and fell on me. She gazed at me in silence; then her glance wandered to the bed and its occupant, and she looked long at the latter. His breathing had grown less labored now. Her gaze traveled back to me where I sat on the bottom of the bed.

"You saved him?" she asked quietly. I nodded my head.

"Why?" The question rather staggered me, and I hesitated.

"Why?" she repeated. "What is he to you that you should have interfered? I would have paid you well. I would have given you all that you could have asked; half his fortune would be little enough to pay for his death! He is rich, far richer than even I know of; but I do not want his money. Heavens!" She started from her seat and fell on her knees before me, her arms held out to me in supplication. "See, there is yet time!" she whispered hoarsely. "The knife! Where is it? What have you done with it?" Her eyes searched rapidly the bed, the floor, my hands. "Kill him! I will make you rich—rich—rich!"

She sank to the floor in exhaustion and looked into my face beseechingly. I shook my head. She rose unsteadily to her feet.

"You coward! You fool!" she hissed. "What is his life among so many? Are there not thousands of fiends left in the world? Let this one go back then to his Maker. He ought to be pleased with His work!" she laughed horribly. "Where is the knife? Give it to me!"

Again I shook my head. She dropped her hands and went back to her chair and sank into it wearily, with a look of hopeless misery on her face. When she spoke again she was calmer.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"My name matters little," I replied; "call me the Hand of Providence." She took no notice.

"You are a burglar?"

"I have that honor."

"You came for——"

"Your jewels."

"They are in my room; the second drawer in the bureau; all save these."

She held out a hand, on the fingers of which blazed three diamonds of immense size and beauty. I looked at them with interest. The sleeve of her loose gown was drawn back from the outstretched wrist, and my gaze fell on something that startled me more than the stones—a white, firm arm, carrying a wale an inch wide, and purple as though marked with ink.

"What is that?" I asked.

For answer she drew her sleeve farther up her arm. Two other similar marks discolored the fair surface. I looked from them to her face, doubting the evidences of my senses.

"They are nothing," she said, her lips curling with scorn, "only marks of affection from my husband." I shuddered and glanced at the quiet figure on the bed. "They are the least of all—look!"

She tore the gown away from her shoulder. Purple and blue and yellow marks crossed and recrossed there.

"A whip?" I asked.

"A cane," she answered.

"Why?"

"Because it is his pleasure."

"But why do you not get a divorce? Surely——"

"He is a devil incarnate. No one knows, not even the servants, he is so careful." She laughed mirthlessly. "Our friends, acquaintances, every one, think us a model couple. Neglected wives hereabouts hold that fiend up to their husbands' gaze as an example of marital perfection. For months I have labored to provoke him to strike me before the servants. But no; he is only 'grieved at my conduct.' Once when I expected blows I hid my maid in the closet of my room. When he came in he went straight to the door and sent her away; and then I suffered. He is in league with the devil!"

We sat in silence a moment. I thought of nothing to say, for my blood was hot within me. The clock on the stairs shrieked thrice. She arose.

"I must go back," she said. "Will you come and take the jewels? Heaven knows they are nothing to me!"

"No," I answered roughly.

I thanked Heaven fervently under my breath when she arose and her sleeve fell back over those marks; the dagger burnt in my pocket, and my fingers itched to have it out; and, were it in my hand and those cruel stripes before my eyes, I think, nay, I know for truth, that in another moment I should have buried the knife where it belonged!

"One minute, please." I arose. "These things must be put away." I took up the phial, still half full of chloroform, and hurled it far out of the window. "A burglar does not leave such things about." I picked up the torn drapery.

"I suppose you would have bound your hands with this?"

She nodded.

"And gagged yourself with this?"

Again she nodded.

"And how could you have tied your own hands?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I should have done the best I could. In the excitement of the morning no one would have noticed whether the knot was tight or loose."

I looked at her with professional admiration.

"True; I don't believe they would." I laid down the curtain again. The smaller piece I folded and put in my pocket. I moved several chairs back into their places.

"That is all, I think."

She moved toward the door. I took the dagger from my pocket.

"And this?" I asked, holding it out to her.

"Keep it," she said. "The stones are of value."

"I will keep it," I answered, "but not for the stones."

I unlocked the door and held it open for her. With lamp in hand, she paused on the door-sill.

"Are you proud of what you have done?" she asked, wearily.

"Heaven help me!" I answered under my breath. "I am sorry."

A softer look crept into her face.

"No, do not be. For a while longer my soul is without crime. For that I should thank you."

Impulsively she stretched her hand to me. The sleeve fell away from her wrist. Something came before my eyes like a dim, red veil. Dropping to my knees, I pushed back her sleeve and pressed a mad kiss on her arm over one disfiguring wale.

Then I staggered to my feet and stood before her with lowered eyes, muttering: "Forgive me—forgive me!" over and over.

She made no answer, and presently I gathered courage to lift my eyes, expecting to find her gone. Instead my gaze fell on her face, whereon I saw no sign of anger, only a troubled smile, and, I think, a faint flush in her cheeks.

"It was nothing," she said simply. "It is only that you are sorry for a woman, and"—a sob crept into her voice—"I am not used to it."

I made no reply. She went out and across the hall, and in at her door, and when it had closed upon her I was left in darkness.

For some time I stood there motionless. Perhaps it was a minute—perhaps an hour—I do not know. Then I shook myself together and closed the door and locked it. From the man's face I took away the cloth and put it into my pocket. Then I remembered his watch, which ticked away in the folds of my coat, and I took it out and threw it on the bed by him. At the window I paused and looked out as I had done nearly two hours before. To the left of the house the sky was growing pink with the first pearly light of the new day. With one foot on the sill, I hesitated, and then went back into the room.

When again I was ready to depart, I stood outside on the ledge and drew down the window after me. Then I dropped to the ground safely, and without noise, and hurried away over the silent road to the village.

And as I went I tossed some bits of torn paper to the roadside.

# THE PIANO ACROSS THE DOOR

BY HAROLD STEELE MACKAYE

THERE had been a serious break between the Himmelslieds, father and son; and a lack of harmony between musicians so devoted was as amazing as deplorable.

These were the circumstances:

For several years these two had lived together alone in the front flat at number 303. They had dwelt in the bonds of an affection rendered doubly strong by the death of the wife and mother, and until recently had found their art and each other all sufficient to happiness.

It all began by Himmelslied, Senior, taking it into his head that young Max ought to marry; and when this notion was strengthened by a vacancy in the rear flat on the same floor at 303, he had broached the subject to his son.

Max had favored the proposition but little. He pointed out that a separation between himself and his father was out of the question, and that he know no one with sufficient beauty of soul and body to make matrimony attractive.

To the first of these objections the old gentleman had replied by calling attention to the vacant rear flat, and dwelling with particular emphasis on the fact that the two apartments were connected by a door leading directly from one parlor to the other.

To the second objection the loving father had also an answer as satisfactory. He had found just the bride he and his son needed.

"It is not beauty of soul and body we want, Max," he had said. "What we need is good cookery and good housekeeping."

He then dwelt pathetically upon the inefficiency of day servants—upon the disorder in which his own declining days were being spent, and upon the waste in the commissary department.

He declared that he had found a charming, steady woman—not too young and not too old—famous as a housekeeper, and undoubtedly to be had by such a fine fellow as Max.

The younger man lighted his second cigar and asked for the lady's name between puffs.

"It is Clara Blauvelt."

"Ahem!" remarked Max, and resumed his listening.

*"Shut up! Get out! You are not any longer my son! Do you hear me?"*

"Yes, she is two years older than you, my boy—but what a manager! Her father looks like a most well-groomed steed. She is most healthy. She is good-natured and knows well how to laugh. She will make us happy. I have told her you would call to see her this evening. You must start right away."

Max looked up in surprise.

"What! And our Grieg sonata?"

The father sighed.

"I must go without it to-night. But, Max," and here an impressive finger was raised, "make good use of your time, my boy. We have known the Blauvelts two years. You have my approval. Ask her to-night."

This haste appeared quite natural to Max, and as he looked upon the whole matter with extreme indifference, he decided to call as his father had arranged.

But, alas, the ways of Providence are past searching out. He called on Clara and found her entertaining a young cousin of hers, whom she introduced to him as Annette Marx. Her shy smile and blush, those deep yet timid eyes and sensitive, half melancholy mouth, intensified and stamped by the touch of her soft, hesitating hand in his—all these seemed to fit into the individual needs of his being, and filled him so immediately and completely that when he returned to 303, and his father asked for an account of his call, he had remembered for the first time what his errand had been. In his confusion he re-

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plied that nothing was settled, and to change the subject insisted upon their getting to their music.

It appeared that the matters left to be settled took much time and many calls, but somehow Max always forgot to tell his father that it was Annette that he was courting, and not Clara. His reason for this reticence was due to the existence of an ancient enmity between Himmelslied, Senior, and Annette's father—a quarrel so bitter that Max had never known of Annette's existence until the night he met her.

The feud had not been mentioned since the death of old Marx, fifteen months before, but Max well knew that his father would never consent to an alliance with the hated family.

Consequently, telling Annette that his father had gone abroad for some time, he induced her to marry him very quietly one fine morning, and forthwith led her on his arm to 303, all innocent and unsuspecting of the welcome in store.

The bridegroom had rented that convenient rear flat, and had in his pocket the key to the famous door of communication. He had secretly furnished and comfortably disposed the conjugal nest during a brief business trip his father had made.

The plan which Max laid out for himself was to smuggle his bride into the new apartment, and unlocking the door between the two flats, at a moment when the old gentleman was in a good humor, capture his heart by the force of surprise and Annette's appealing charms. Her maiden name was to be kept a secret as long as possible.

But, as it happened, old Hugo was dismissing a tiresome pupil, just as the young couple unsuspectingly turned the last corner in their ascent of the stairs.

Then came the break—and the true commencement of this history.

The outraged father was sitting on his piano stool, revolving like a feverish weather-cock, in a state bordering upon apoplexy.

His mind was filled with a number of contending memories of what had occurred during that terrible meeting on the stairs. He was only clear on one point, which was that in some way he had found out that his son's bride was a daughter of that scoundrel Marx. He had a vague notion that he had thrown the offending lovers over the banisters—or was it only Annette? Anyway, the sound of the fall three stories below appeared to reverberate through his whole disordered being.

"Married! Married! And to a Marx!" he snorted, now and again.

He did it in an effort to keep his rage on a par with those guilty fears of possible homicide. Did he really throw them down-stairs? If not, what did he do, and why that sound of falling bodies in his brain?

As his blood gradually cooled, the sounds changed their character, and he soon realized that what he had taken for repeated falls was a continual knocking at his door.

It was Max, looking quite calm and cool.

Of course, that settled it. The old gentleman realized that, whatever else he had done, he had thrown neither of the offenders down-stairs. This left his rage free from any conscientious shackles, and he grew purple in the face again.

To tell the truth, he felt a little sorry now that he had not committed that desperate deed.

Max had hoped to find his father in a cooler frame of mind, and had come expressly to beg forgiveness and seek to soften his father's wrath. The silent rage evident in his father's face and manner reduced the poor fellow's contrite speech to a stammering, halting jumble, so intensely irritating to old Hugo that he simply flapped his arms, and leaning forward on his stool, he shouted:

"Shut up! Get out! You are not any longer my son! Do you hear me—eh? You are *niemand*. I renounce you! Go to your dough-faced wife! You scoundrel—you——"

The old man stopped, panted, his eyes bulging, and his white hair hanging over his flushed face. It was not for lack of breath, for the Himmelslied lungs and throat were wonderfully made, but simply because a new and still more irritating visitor had appeared.

Standing at the open door that united the two apartments, one hand upon her breast, and the other holding the wall for support, was little Annette. The paragon of neatness she seemed, with her fresh Belgian face and her carefully arranged yellow hair. But no Gorgon—no medieval gargoyle, grinning with fiendish menace—could have been less welcome to the eyes of the furious father.

There was a leap and a hoarse cry, and before young Max could move one step to prevent it, the young bride had been pushed back into her own apartment, and the door violently slammed in her face.

Hugo turned to his son:

"Oh—so—so! You will come through the door in, will you? We shall see now—we shall see!"

And with the astonishing strength of great anger, old Hugo tugged and tore at his upright piano until he had moved it directly across the offending door, completely blocking access through that opening.

His efforts exhausted him, and as he leaned against the instrument, he had only strength enough left to point to the door into his own hall, with a meaning Max could not but understand.

All this had been so suddenly begun and so rapidly accomplished that the young husband had been quite unable to do more than take in what had happened before it was over.

Annette's appearance had been arranged in the hope of finding the old gentleman in a cooler frame of mind. Her rough reception—the thought of the tears she must be shedding alone in her new home in consequence—and, lastly, the almost contemptuous dismissal implied by that extended hand, had heated the young man's blood.

Pale and rigid with suppressed anger, he gazed straight into his father's face, and his words came slowly and sternly.

"You have driven me from our home! You have dared to raise your hand against my wife! You have closed the door between us! So be it! Lose all who love you! Live alone! Alone, save for your bitter conscience! The day will come when you will long for harmony once more—but it will be lost! You have killed it!"

He was gone. The outer door was slammed.

As the echo died away, a grim shadow of loneliness darkened the old man's heart, and sinking into his chair exhausted, half remorseful already, he wept, uncomforted.

The odds were surely against old Hugo! No one could have doubted it who, seeing the lonely tears of the father on one side of that sealed door, could also behold the tender scene just beginning on the other.

Annette, too, was weeping. But they were sweet tears, shed on a bridegroom's shoulder.

The father's agony grew stronger as he wept, in the consciousness of sympathy withdrawn. But Annette had two strong arms about her, and her every sob was met by the answering pressure of her husband's embrace.

This sorrow for her was a means of happiness—a part of the enchantment that made that opening day of wed-

ded life an epoch holy and precious, then and ever after. Yes—surely—old Hugo was fighting against hopeless odds!

"There, there! Don't cry, little woman! Be brave now," Max was saying. "Think of it, my darling, you are a woman—a maiden no longer. Be my dear, brave little wife—Annette! My pretty one!" and then he whispered silly love-names, and kissed her ear, which was all he could reach, until, by much coaxing, he lifted her chin and pressed his hairy cheek to her smooth wet one. For a little while she remained thus, and with all his sympathy, Max thrilled with pleasure as each hard-drawn breath shook the beloved face so close to his. Nor was she less happy, in truth.

It could not last long, a grief so baseless, and the couple were soon seated side by side, their hands clasped, and her youthful face made all the prettier and more lovable by the passing of the storm.

"Now, Max," she said, very seriously, "Father Himmelslied must be reconciled. You were very wrong not to tell him about our marriage, and, above all, not to tell me of his ignorance. Why did you pretend he had gone to Belgium for three months? Do you think I would have married you in his absence if I had known the truth? No, indeed!"

"Sweetheart!"

It was all he could say. But he kissed the circle of gold on her left hand, and she smiled and drew her breath a little hard.

She was eminently a humorous soul, was Annette, and as the two continued to discuss the situation, their conversation soon assumed a jocose aspect, scarcely to have been predicted from its tearful commencement.

Max told of his farewell words to his father, and Annette's gentle heart bled for the old man's bereavement.

"The day will come," Max had said, "when you will long for harmony once more, but it will be lost, for you have killed it."

She repeated the threat inwardly several times, and then suddenly stood upright beside her husband, and looked down at him with mischief in those unfathomable eyes of hers. The humorous elf who made his home within her had whispered a fanciful interpretation of that warning from a son to his father.

"Max," she said, dimpling prettily, "are you sure those are just the words you used?"

"Certain," Max replied.

"And the piano is across the door and we have the key?"

"Yes."

She clapped her hands and jumped just once. Then she retired to an easy-chair, so that Max would, of course, have to follow her, and disclosed a marvelous plan for the speedy conquest of the unreconciled father-in-law.

That night, while Hugo was sighing for sleep that would not come, something curious happened in the deserted parlor. The famous door of communication was slowly opened behind the piano, and Max looked cautiously over the top of the instrument.

Then he knelt and proceeded to cut a piece from the fabric that covered the back of the piano case. This accomplished, the intruder drew from his pocket three small wedges of hard wood and pressed them firmly between three pairs of piano wires, near their lower point of attachment. Such a contrivance, of course, reduced the vibratory length of the wires so treated, and put six important notes seriously out of tune.

Then the door was closed again, and silence and darkness once more reigned supreme.

The next morning Hugo found an open sheet of paper and a sealed note in his mail.

Upon the former, in Max's well-known hand, was written:

"The day will come when you will long for harmony once more—but it will be lost. You have killed it."

Hugo tore the paper in two and stamped upon it.

He opened the little note, and before he realized it had read the following message, written in French, evidently by a woman's hand:

"DEAR PAPA HUGO:—I have made a Belgian pancake, just for you. No one else shall have it. If you will accept it, knock on the door—if not I will throw it away. With much love, your daughter ANNETTE."

Himmelslied snorted, took the note between his two hands to tear it, paused, and then simply crumpled it and threw it on the floor behind him.

Then he sat down to an abominable breakfast, over which floated the phantom of a rejected pancake such as he used to get in Brussels.

The meal was scarcely despatched when the first pupil arrived, and the musician strode into the parlor in a humor far from enviable.

As it happened, the pupil was a young woman for whose natural powers Hugo had but little respect. He wasted no words, therefore, but opening her music, set it before her and bade her begin.

At the first chord both teacher and pupil started in amazement and horror. The discord was ingeniously painful.

"*Sacre!*" shouted Himmelslied; "what are you doing?"

"Why—why—I don't know!" the pupil exclaimed. "I played it as written."

"Played it as written!" snarled Hugo, striding to her side. "What do you think Mozart was—a tin horn? Here! These are the notes. So!" and he brought his fingers down with tremendous vigor.

His disgust, amazement and discomfiture may be imagined. The pupil giggled, and he bowed her stiffly out, telling her that the instrument was out of tune.

The tuner came within an hour, and for the remainder of the day all went smoothly. Nothing more was heard from the occupants of the rear apartment, and Hugo had time to turn over in his mind the events that had happened during the day.

As he pondered on the solemn warning that Max had now twice given him, he began to see a mysterious connection between that threat and the strange disorder which had attacked his beloved piano-forte. The old musician was prone to mysticism, and it seemed to him that the impaired harmony in his piano strings might have some occult connection with his jangled domestic relations.

Nor was this impression lessened by the events of the next day. Again came that note of warning, and with it Annette's offer of another pancake—"a better one than yesterday," she wrote. Hugo was very fond of those immense pancakes made of butter, eggs and flour, and rolled around a morsel of jelly. Since Max's mother had died he had not tasted one that came up to his ideal. He found himself wondering whether, by any possibility, his son had found a wife like his own in respect to pancakes, and the thought forced him to yield to a moment of tender recollection. This time Annette's little message was simply laid upon his table.

During the night Max had withdrawn the wedges, and thus undone the tuner's work. Consequently, when Hugo stepped from his disordered and hateful breakfast table to his piano, he was thrilled with superstitious astonish-

ment to find that once more all harmony had left the instrument he loved.

It was with thoughts of his early married days that he had turned to the piano that morning, and his fingers had naturally drawn forth the first notes of a song which his wife loved to sing to his accompaniment in the far-away past—before Max was born.

He had played a number of bars before the music necessitated the use of the false notes. Then had come that horrid and mysterious jangle, and for a few seconds he sat in almost stupid despair.

"But hark! What was that?

The air was being continued in the next flat. How well that scoundrel Max played the closing bars of the prelude!

Hugo thought of his son's gifts as a musician.

"Like both father and mother, that boy!" he thought. "Ah!—If——"

He stopped and drew in his breath, holding up one finger as though to enjoin silence.

A charming voice—it seemed a spirit from the past—had taken up the song, mingling with the sympathetic harmony of the accompaniment, and melting every hard element left in the lonely listener's heart.

Hush! Oh! How like his dead wife the little bride sang those words:

"Sweet is thy breath as early morn,
Deep are thine eyes as forest shades,
Solemn and pure the light there born
As in the west when evening fades."

Old Hugo's eyes pierced piano and door. He could see the trim figure of his daughter, as she called herself, and the mutual glances she and Max exchanged. And then it was his Marguerite and himself he saw—they were in the old country again, and the words came from far away as the white head drooped slowly to find support on the trembling hand.

The song was over.

Hugo stood up, blew his nose, and listened a moment. There was dead silence.

"What is the use?" he exclaimed.

He swung the piano forward with all his strength, and with a sobbing laugh pounded like a giant with both fists upon the closed door.

"Where is that pancake?" he roared.

Like magic the door opened and the old man literally fell into the arms of his son. There was a long, silent embrace, and then Hugo stepped back, and thumping his son vigorously on the chest——

"You rascal!" he cried. "It's not you I want now! It's your—it's the pancake!"

Behold, there it was, steaming its savory welcome to him from a plate in the delighted Annette's hands. Hugo scarcely glanced at the luscious morsel, but let his eyes and mind feast upon the exquisite picture and sweet promise his new daughter presented. After all, what a lovely little woman this was Max had brought home, with those deep eyes, and that sensitive mouth so easily turned to melancholy or to merriment.

The father overflowed, and taking the pretty face between his hands——

"My daughter," he said. "You have a voice like our Max's mother," and he kissed the rosy mouth.

In the meantime Max had slipped the wedges back into the much-abused piano, and just as Hugo opened his mouth for the first bite of the famous pancake, his hand was arrested and his mouth held open by sheer astonishment.

Max was playing the dear old air on the mysterious piano-forte, now no longer standing across the door.

The tune was perfect.

Hugo turned his amazed eyes to Annette, who stood beside him.

She sank on her knees and cuddled her charming head close to his shoulder.

"It is the kind Goddess Harmony who has returned," she said, roguishly.

## A NEW MILITARY ROAD

A MILITARY road extending from West Point into the branch roads of the New England States, to be built by New York State, is proposed in a bill introduced in the Assembly at Albany, N. Y., on January 30th. This measure carries an appropriation of $5,000 to cover the cost of the preliminary survey. The Adjutant-General and the State Highway Commissioner are to certify to the State Engineer the general course of the road.

## WHEN WORLD PEACE CAME BEFORE

"THE last great war has been fought, and the nations may now look forward to uninterrupted peace."

This was the hope and the belief proclaimed from many pulpits in England 102 years ago, January 18, 1816, when Great Britain, by royal proclamation, celebrated a general thanksgiving day, following the end of the Napoleonic wars.

After the smoke of Waterloo rolled back it revealed a continent given over to desolation. Although England had suffered less than the other nations involved in the long struggle, she had by no means escaped unscathed. For twenty years Great Britain had supplied the financial sinews of war for her allies, in addition to active participation in battles on land and sea.

When the English people were called upon to give thanks for peace, they were scarcely in a thankful mood. A national debt of £500,000,000 necessitated taxation so heavy as to cause general distress. Most obnoxious of all was the tax on the importation of grain, which rendered foodstuffs so high in price that hundreds of thousands of people were constantly on the verge of starvation. All over the country factories and mills ceased operations and armies of workmen were thrown out of employment, which added to the general distress.

While the nations of continental Europe relapsed in 1816 into savage political despotism and all attempts to keep alive the spirit of revolution were ruthlessly crushed, Great Britain became increasingly radical. Great labor meetings were held in the industrial centers, and the workers had spokesmen in Parliament who grew more and more importunate. It was not until the close of 1816 that the clouds of financial and industrial depression began to lift and, with increasing prosperity, the extreme radicals lost their influence.

# MISS TANNETT'S INSIGHT

BY WILL N. HARBEN

"YOU must really be more careful, dear. You are growing less suspicious every day, and that is a dangerous state of mind for a dealer in precious stones."

Miss Tannett sat behind the polished show-cases in the great jewelry house of Steinbach & Co., and as she spoke glanced up tenderly at her lover, a junior partner in the establishment.

He smiled indulgently, as he readjusted the diamonds and placed them in order where they could be seen to the best advantage in the light from the great windows, which looked out on Broadway.

"Why so, darling?" he asked.

"Because, Lionel, the oldest, wisest, and most cautious dealers are being taken in every now and then, in some way or other. It seems to me that you never suspect any one, and unless you are constantly on the alert you will some day be caught napping. The cold chills ran over me just now when I saw you turn your back to that woman, leaving a tray of diamond rings before her."

Lionel Burnham laughed heartily.

"That was the wife of Judge Hill," he said. "I have known her in a business way for ten years. Besides, you wrong me if you think I am not cautious, even with people I know well."

He opened the show-case and drew out the tray she had mentioned.

"You see, my dear girl," he continued, "each compartment of the tray is occupied by a ring. When I came back to Mrs. Hill, if one had been empty, I should have had her arrested without a moment's warning."

*"Stop," she ordered firmly. "If you move I shall shoot you!"*

"It is not that sort of customer that I am talking about," said the young lady earnestly. "But you must not grow careless, and should always be on your guard. You told me once that if the firm were to lose heavily, through any lack of caution on your part, you might lose your present position. Now, you know, if such a thing were to happen, it would seriously interfere with the plans about our wedding this winter."

"That's true enough," replied Burnham. "Old Steinbach objected strongly to my entering the firm, anyway, and if I should lose them a pile of money, I wouldn't give a snap for my future chances."

"And it would go against you in the estimation of other dealers, too, I presume."

"Decidedly. That sort of thing usually gives a fellow a black eye, but I think I am sometimes cautious to a fault."

"In some cases you may be, perhaps," returned Miss Tannett. "But it seems to me you are lacking in the natural intuition that a woman has for discerning evil in people."

"That sort of thing is a little too fine for me," remarked the young man; "but, nevertheless, I haven't had any trouble so far. What on earth started you worrying this way?"

"I noticed that man with the long overcoat and green goggles on a few minutes ago. I don't exactly know why it was, but I did not like his looks. I was surprised that you let him pass out of your mind just as you would any other customer."

"Why should I trouble about him?" asked Burnham. "He did not seem ready to purchase. He said he would call again. If he does, all well and good; if not, that settles it."

"What do you suppose he wore green goggles for, and a wig much darker than the natural hair beneath it?"

"I really don't know," laughed Burnham. "I didn't have time to ask him. Perhaps his eyes are sore, and his hair restorer failed to get in its work."

"His eyes are not sore," declared Miss Tannett, "for

I purposely walked to the door to look under his goggles. His eyes are as clear and bright as those diamonds; besides, they had a cunning, sinister look. As to his hair, it was as thick as yours, and a better, more becoming color than his wig. I actually believe he was in disguise."

"Oh, now, that's going too far, dear," laughed the young man.

"I don't care, I think so," said Miss Tannett, leaning back into her chair with deepening conviction.

"If he comes back, I'll take a better look at him," promised Burnham; "but even if he were in disguise, he can't steal from under my very eyes."

At that moment the man under discussion drove up to the door in a carriage, alighted and entered. He was richly dressed, and wore several fine stones on his fingers and in the bosom of his shirt.

"I have decided to come back and select some of your jewels," he said to Burnham. "I shall now be more open with you. The purchase I intend to make will be a considerable one indeed. It is for a very wealthy man in San Francisco. I think, if we can agree on the price, that I shall take nearly all the stones you showed me just now."

Burnham caught his breath in astonishment.

"Very well," he said. And as he turned to get the diamonds from the safety vault he caught the glance of his fiancée.

"Watch him closely, for heaven's sake!" her large eyes seemed to say.

But it seemed that there was little need for caution, for Burnham had no sooner placed the jewels before the customer than an interruption came. A messenger boy entered with a telegram for the stranger, who seemed very much surprised when it was handed to him.

"Surely it can't be for me," he said, as he turned aside to read it.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, crushing the paper in his hand and thrusting it into the pocket of his overcoat; "I see that I am to be disturbed again. This message informs me that a person I had expected to meet last night on important business is waiting for me at the Lotus Club. I can't afford to run the risk of missing him again. But" (the customer seemed to reflect) "do you ever—I presume you could send this lot of jewels—with a trusty agent, of course—to my hotel—Hotel Galatin—say this afternoon at two o'clock? I could then look them over at my leisure and make the selections. Would that plan suit you?"

"Perfectly, sir," answered Burnham. "The name, please."

The stranger drew out a card and laid it on the showcase.

"Alfred Warren," he said; "that's my name. Ask for Room 204."

"Very well, Mr. Warren," said Burnham politely, and the customer left the store, stepped into the carriage, and was driven away.

"Hardly gave me time to examine his hair and eyes," jested Burnham to Miss Tannett, who had risen and was looking out at a large show-window after the departing vehicle. "Now, my dear, you see I'm going to make a gigantic sale, and—why, what's the matter, dear?"

The young lady had turned to him, her brow wrinkled as if she were perplexed.

"I can't understand it," she answered, sitting down, "and it always makes me furious to feel this way. There is surely something wrong and yet—ah!"

"What under the sun is the matter?" asked the young man. "You are acting very queerly to-day."

"To begin with, that message was not genuine," she said, in a tone of conviction. "Then the carriage was not a private one."

"How do you know?" asked the junior partner incredulously.

Miss Tannett's face was almost pale with suppressed excitement. Her fine eyes sparkled as she looked up at her lover.

"In a big city like this," she said, "telegrams are usually delivered at the place to which they are addressed. If he did not leave instructions to have it delivered at this house, he would not have received it here."

Burnham's indulgent smile once more played over his face.

"There is no reason why he could not have given this address," said he. "He started out to purchase the stones, and our house has a reputation for fair dealing all over the country."

"Then why was he so astonished at receiving the telegram?" asked Miss Tennett.

"Ah! I see. That does look strange," ejaculated Burnham, "but you said the carriage——"

"Was not a private one, nor was it, in spite of the fine livery of the driver. It was hired for the occasion. I know that, for the lamps had a number on them. Private carriages never have numbers."

"You ought to have been a detective, dear," laughed Burnham; "but I can't think you have any right to be so suspicious. However, I shall take extra precaution and be armed to the teeth, as it were, when I take the stones to his hotel this afternoon. If there is more than one man in the room, I shall refuse to enter without police protection. What more could you ask?"

Miss Tannett put her hand impulsively on Burnham's arm.

"Lionel," she said, "I want to go with you. Do let me, I'm so much interested in it all."

The junior partner reflected.

"I hardly know—and yet—why, yes, you may go if you wish. I see no harm in it."

"Thank you," exclaimed the young lady. She picked up a small revolver from the counter near her and put it inside her cloak. "I shall take this with me. See, no one would dream I had it, and you know something of my marksmanship."

Arriving at the Hotel Galatin at the appointed hour, they were informed by the clerk that the gentleman they sought was in his room on the third floor.

"Pretty high up for a $50,000 customer," thought Miss Tannett, and she pressed her elbow against her side to feel the revolver, which was still in the pocket of her fur cloak. All her suspicions had failed to make the slightest impression on Burnham. He carried the case, containing about $75,000 worth of diamonds, in his hand, and allowed his enthusiasm over the big deal to effervesce in his face. He was not only going to make his position in the firm more substantial than ever, but intended to show his fiancée how absurb it was to suspect people of dishonesty till they had proved themselves dishonest.

The occupant of Room 204 opened the door in answer to Burnham's rap. He no longer wore his goggles, and Miss Tannett got a good view of his rather handsome and sinister face. She was sure that instead of being displeased at seeing the junior partner accompanied by a lady, Mr. Warren looked as if he were agreeably surprised. This fact set the active mind of the young lady to work on several hypotheses more or less reasonable. Did he suppose that Burnham's attention would be drawn from his duty by her? If so, he should find himself mis-

taken, for she would not encourage Burnham to talk to her, and, moreover, she intended to keep her eyes open as if her very life depended on it.

"Ah! happy to see you so prompt," exclaimed Mr. Warren. "I am glad you are on time, for I want to get through the selection and pay you for the stones. I have a pressing engagement in Brooklyn at three o'clock."

"I am ready," said the junior partner, placing the case of stones on a table in the center of the room and unlocking it. Miss Tannett sank on a divan and watched the two men take seats opposite each other. She was glad to have a view of Mr. Warren's face, and quickly scanned the room, but detected no food for her suspicion. She hardly thought that the closet or the wardrobe could hold armed confederates of Warren. She did not suspect the closet, because its door was honestly ajar, and the wardrobe appeared too tight for a human being to breathe in long at a time.

Mr. Warren proceeded to make his selection in a very businesslike manner. Burnham saw that he was a good judge of stones. Now and then he would step to a window to get a better light, and he examined all the stones under a magnifying-glass. He had picked up an empty cardboard box, which had contained gentlemen's collars, and when he decided in favor of a gem he dropped it into the box, and made a note on a sheet of paper with a pencil.

The junior partner felt ashamed of himself for having listened to the suspicions of his fiancée against such a perfect gentleman, and laid himself out to be agreeable.

Once, while Mr. Warren was examining a gem at the window, Burnham glanced at the girl, and her fine face, set in an expression of tense watchfulness, provoked a smile on his part—a smile rendered all the more whole-souled by the great satisfaction Burnham felt. He had not dreamt that she could be so suspicious of mankind, but he was seeing her in a new light, and admiring her for adhering to her convictions.

Mr. Warren turned from the window and dropped the stone he had been looking at into the box. "It's all right," he said, "but you are getting a stiff price for it." Then he sat down and took up another stone. The heads of the two men were close together.

Suddenly, in the hall outside, there was a sound of something heavy, like a well-packed trunk, falling to the floor. It shook the very walls of the room. Then it was that the honest closet became more frank. Its door slowly opened, and Miss Tannett saw the interior of the little room. She started, not because it contained robbers in ambush, but because it was absolutely empty. She saw only the white walls and the two rows of shining brass hooks.

She was now sure that Mr. Warren did not occupy the room permanently. There was nothing in the appearance of the apartment to indicate that he did. It had just the air of a hotel room when one enters it for the first time, behind a porter with his bunch of keys. What could be Mr. Warren's scheme? Could it be his intention to drug them, or deaden their senses with some subtle gas, against which he himself was proof? She sniffed the air, but detected no deadly odor.

In about half an hour the selection of stones was completed. Mr. Warren pushed the cardboard box towards Burnham, and leaned back in his chair.

"That will do," he said wearily. "Add up the items and tell me how much cash you want."

Burnham nodded and glowed as he bent over the figures. The word "cash" had fallen like sweet music on his ear. The stranger was not going to offer payment with a check on a bank. The last vestige of doubt had left the junior partner's mind.

Mr. Warren had already made his calculations. He folded the paper and walked to and fro.

Miss Tannett wondered what was going to happen. She was as sure that something portentous was hovering over the room as that she had her hat on. All at once she wondered if her lover could be hypnotized. Perhaps he was then under the influence of the stranger, and was going to give a fortune in gems for a mere song. She rose and stood beside Burnham's chair, then caught a glimpse of the sum total, and her fears in regard to hypnotism vanished.

The amount was $55,000. Burnham handed the paper to Mr. Warren, who looked over it carelessly.

"It's all right," he said. "That's a big deal for one transaction, eh?"

Burnham nodded and smiled, the flood of his satisfaction dammed up within him. All at once he began to fear that there might be some unexpected hitch in the affair. It seemed too good to be true. He was almost afraid to think of the glory of going back to his firm with a clear profit of fifteen thousand dollars in his hand.

"I will not, of course, offer you a check—not even a certified check—in payment," went on Warren, "for I want to take the stones with me to a bank this afternoon. For that reason I prepared myself for the transaction. Just before you came I deposited with the clerk downstairs enough currency to cover your bill. If you will wait here I'll go down and get it."

He picked up the cardboard box, shook the gems to make them glisten in the light, put the box on the table, and went out, closing the door after him.

"You see——" began the junior partner to Miss Tannett, but he was interrupted by Warren's abrupt return.

"It just occurred to me——" he began. "Pardon me, but you know business is business, and I should like to feel sure that the stones I have selected are—but you understand."

"Of course," said Burnham. "I see, and you are quite right. I will go down with you, if you wish."

"I think I know a better plan," suggested Warren. "I don't think the office of this hotel would be exactly the proper place to transfer such a large sum. One never can tell who is around, you know." As he spoke he picked up the box and began looking about the room. "Ah!" he exclaimed, as he indicated a drawer at the bottom of the wardrobe. "Suppose I put them in the drawer, lock it, and carry the key till I return. You may stay here and keep watch over them."

"Very well," agreed Burnham, glad of such an easy way out of the difficulty.

Warren opened the drawer and put the box into it. As he was closing the drawer, Miss Tannett uttered an exclamation of protest.

"No, no!" she said impulsively, and then stopped short, unable to proceed.

"Ah, I see!" laughed Warren. "You are a cautious little woman, madam, if you will allow me to say so. You thought that perhaps, by some sleight-of-hand trick, I had taken the diamonds from the box. There, see?" He took off the lid and showed her the gems. "They are all safe and sound. I have more confidence in you than you have in me. You may put them in the drawer yourself."

"I beg your pardon," she said, taking the box in her hand. For a minute she held it hesitatingly. Then, too womanly to fight the battles of her intuition, which she blamed for unnecessary dulness at a moment when it could really serve her, she slowly put the box into the drawer and watched Warren close and lock it.

When he had gone, Burnham turned to Miss Tannett.

"I was really shocked, dear, when you——" He paused abruptly, astonished, almost alarmed at her expression. Her face was distorted in a wild effort to solve something which seemed to elude her comprehension.

She laid both her hands on his shoulder. "Think! Think!" she cried. "There is a trick somewhere to defraud you! I know it! He is a sharper. Quick! there is no time to lose. I know—there! I understand it now. The wardrobe is against a doorway. The drawer has a false back that opens into the next room. Quick! pull it aside. I'll watch the hall."

Burnham stood as if turned to stone.

"For heaven's sake, don't stand still!" she cried. She opened the door, and then Burnham heard her scream and saw her draw her revolver, and direct it at some one in the hall.

"Stop!" she ordered firmly. "If you move I shall shoot you. You have the box of diamonds under your coat. I can plainly see it."

"What do you mean?" thundered the voice of Warren. "Stand out of my way!"

"When you have delivered our property," Miss Tannett said, just as Burnham reached her side, his revolver drawn.

"The diamonds are where you put them in that drawer," said the robber, now thoroughly frightened, as he faced the two revolvers presented at him. "Look and see. I was going down to get the money."

"What were you doing in the next room?" asked Miss Tannett. "That is not the way down."

Burnham had comprehended the situation in full, and now regained his presence of mind.

"Put down the box," he said sternly.

A desperate expression came over Warren's face.

"I am willing to have you search me," he said, approaching Burnham with well-assumed frankness, considering his predicament. "You are not going to allow an imaginative woman to mislead you this way."

There was a wavering expression of hesitation in the eye of the junior partner. Warren was within two feet of Burnham's revolver, when he suddenly flung out his hand and sent the weapon spinning through a window into the street. Then like a flash he bent downward, and darted past Miss Tannett, making for the elevator.

She fired, but her shot passed over his head, and before she could raise her revolver again, Warren had knocked down several women who were coming from the elevator, had plunged into it, and closed the barred gate.

"Down!" yelled Warren to the elevator boy. "A crazy woman is trying to murder me!"

The boy stood as if paralyzed with fear. Warren hurled him from the cable lever and pulled it. The elevator started up, but the robber stopped it and jerked it downward. With wonderful presence of mind, Miss Tannett ran down the stairs, reaching the floor below just as the elevator was appearing in sight. She presented her revolver, took a steady aim, and fired. A cry of rage burst from Warren. She heard the box of diamonds rattle on the floor of the elevator, as the robber released the cable lever and put his hand to his side. He reeled and fell. The boy came to himself, grasped the lever, and stopped the elevator on a level with the floor.

"Open the door!" cried Miss Tannett. "He is a thief, and has stolen that box of diamonds!"

The boy obeyed just as Burnham and several men from the office appeared on the scene. Miss Tannett entered the elevator and secured the box of stones. She had no sooner turned away than Warren staggered to his feet, a revolver raised in his hand. Then Burnham sprang upon him and pinned him down. Some one called a policeman, and the wounded robber was take in charge.

Miss Tannett began to explain to the hotel clerk, but failed to express herself coherently, and ended by fainting away as the policeman and the hall porter were dragging Warren outside.

Burnham took her home in a cab, and returned to the store. It transpired later that Warren was one of the most noted and expert diamond thieves in America. His wound proved not to be fatal, and he was sent to prison for twenty years. On being interviewed in his cell, he said that no one but a woman could have detected him in the plans he had laid for that particular occasion.

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# FRENCH FIGHTERS

IT would naturally be supposed that soldiers on returning, plastered with mud, chilled and exhausted, from a period of trench duty, would be allowed to turn in and sleep until they could sleep no longer. But it has been found that the fatigue of this type of warfare is more mental than physical, and that strained nerves made restful slumber impossible when the men went at once from the trenches to a rest camp for several days of idleness.

A remarkably successful method of getting the soldiers back into condition again has been devised by Lieutenant Herbert of the French navy. Without pausing to rest, they are marched from the trenches into the open country back of the line. There they are put through a course of strenuous physical exercise.

Stripped to the waist, the men set out for a cross-country run, over fences and ditches, uphill and down, and along winding forest paths. They jump, climb trees, crawl like snakes through grassy places, all the while shouting and singing at the tops of their voices. It is said that the peasants were amazed and startled at the first sight of half-naked warriors, coming at top speed from a bit of woodland. Each period of violent exercise is followed by one of quiet, easy movements. At the end, with mind diverted, refreshing sleep is easy.

While one object of the new system is to bring back to top form men gone stale from trench life, the fact that they are soldiers is always the first consideration, and each of the exercises prescribed is carefully planned to increase their fighting ability. A man who, through practice in crawling, has acquired agility while lying prostrate, has a better chance of life in a sudden encounter at night in No Man's Land, and running, jumping and climbing make him a more dangerous opponent in a bayonet duel.

The new method has entirely displaced the old system of training recruits just called to the colors. The French soldier is now taught only movements that will be of actual value in battle, including thorough instruction in throwing hand grenades and the use of the bayonet. The open air exercise toughens the muscles, hardens the skin and fits a man to withstand exposure to all kinds of weather.

The great benefits of such training was shown when troops drilled under the new system met in sham battle an equal number developed by the old method. The umpire's decision after the battle was that they had lost four "dead" and a few "wounded," against 300 "dead" for their opponents.

# THE RENEGADE DETECTIVE

## A Serial Story

By RANDOLPH BADGER

### CHAPTER ONE

#### THE STRANGER

THE scene was romantic and picturesque in extreme, and Chiquita's heart was filled with all the delight of her warm Spanish soul as she stood on the veranda and drank in the beauty which Dame Nature had so exquisitely blended on that cool June morning.

She was a little woman of perhaps five-and-twenty, with a petite figure, soft brown cheeks, and the large, languishing, black eyes peculiar to her race, while the heavy masses of her black hair were coiled up on top of her proud little head. She was not exactly a servant, nor was she the mistress of the beautiful summer residence that nestled among the trees on the bank of the sparkling Hudson; for Arthur Desmond had been her benefactor, and had taken her into his magnificent house one stormy night, the winter before, and had ever since given her a home, without questioning her as to who she was, or where she came from.

She was found lying at his door in a senseless condition, illy clothed, half frozen with cold, and it was, perhaps, owing to the sympathetic tenderness and solicitude of Camille Desmond, who interceded for her to the retired old merchant, that Chiquita found a good home and two warm friends. She never said anything of her past, and would have left them when she recovered had they not pressed her to remain, when they discovered that she did not know exactly where she would go upon leaving the shelter of their roof-tree.

She had a secret sorrow, too, but bore it unmurmuringly.

Thus it was, when Arthur Desmond and his beautiful daughter-in-law, Camille, went to the country, Chiquita accompanied them.

Rich and affluent as were the old gentleman and his daughter-in-law, there was a grim skeleton in their closet, too; but this was kept suppressed, for the memory was a painful one, and seldom touched upon. The manor—Brierly, it was called—was charmingly situated, and well kept, and it was considered one of the most handsome of the many mansions in that immediate vicinity. The house itself was low and rambling, like a French chateau, covered with ivy and surrounded by a park. There was a boat-house down by the river-bank at the foot of the gardens, and barns and outhouses back of the left wing. It faced a dusty road running to the city, which was about three miles distant, and adjoined another handsome estate occupied by Captain Dan Fulton, a retired seafaring man whose unguarded grounds were left open to all the vagabonds and tramps who chanced to pass that way. On the morning we refer to, as Chiquita came out on the veranda to breathe the fresh, pure morning air before breakfasting, and feasted her senses upon the innumerable points of artistic beauty surrounding the house, two peculiar-looking individuals approached her, coming up from the river.

One was a man of about thirty, with a rusty suit of black covering his slim form, an equally as rusty-looking silk hat cocked rakishly on one side of his head, and a shirt bosom, collar, and red necktie, that looked as if they had seen better days, like the rest of his apparel. His face was narrow, his nose sharp and long, his hair black, and his mustache very sparse. There was an ambitious twinkle in his shrewd-looking gray eyes, and a stealthy cautiousness betrayed in his slinking walk. His companion was a boy of perhaps twelve or fifteen years of age. There was nothing characterizing him save his tattered brown trousers, a blue flannel shirt, and a battered felt hat, through the holes in the top of which his yellow hair protruded in ungainly tufts.

His feet were bare, his skin dirty and travel-stained, and his whole appearance at once forlorn; but there was a bright look on his broad, chubby face, and an ingenuousness and frankness of uncommon degree in his wide-open blue eyes.

Chiquita looked at this curiously assorted pair as they came up and paused before the house, with undisguised interest.

"Good-morning, ma'am," said the man, with a profound bow. "A nice day."

"Very pleasant," replied Chiquita hesitatingly.

"Will you permit me to introduce my friend to your notice?" he continued, civilly, as he made a flourish with the umbrella he carried. "Late of the celebrated Bostonian Sparkling Triangle. Double rings, horizontal and flying, with continuous flip-flaps, aerial contortions, and all of the most daring kinds of high-kicking. Commonly called Slinking Sammy." Then to the boy—"Now, then, young 'un, spread yourself, and I'll 'tend the hat-box."

The next moment Chiquita was startled by seeing the boy fly up into the air; there was an extraordinary whirl, of which nothing could be seen but legs, and they spun around and around with dizzy gryations a moment, then stopped. The legs dissolved from a pinwheel, and she saw a panting boy. Before she could even define these proportions distinctly, off he went again into a series of cartwheels, bounding hither and thither like a rubber-ball, and then with a number of backward leaps from hands to feet, he finally came walking up to the veranda with his feet doing the duty of his hands, and his hands doing the duty of his feet.

"Bravo!" said the slim individual. "Well done, Sammy."

"Oh, my gracious!" was all Chiquita could ejaculate.

"Will you subscribe, ma'am?" said the slim man, taking off his hat insinuatingly, while the double-jointed Samuel, with an indescribable fling, suddenly came to a perpendicular. "Live and let live is our motto."

"Why, Chiquita, who are these extraordinary people?" said a voice at this juncture, and Camille stepped out of the open window from behind the curtains where she had witnessed the whole performance.

She was about twenty-three years old, tall, and of a blonde style of beauty.

A dark dress gave her the appearance of being in mourning, and showed the almost ghastly paleness of her delicate and beautiful features in stronger contrast. The slim man bowed very respectfully and interposed:

"Jigger, ma'am."

"Sir?" she asked, with increasing surprise.

"Jigger," he repeated. "This is Slinking Sammy, the roadside acrobat."

"Where do you come from?"

"Well, ma'am, that is hard to say, considering that we travel everywhere. We are genteel tramps, so to speak, and our last abiding-place was Boston, the delightful city of ethical culture. We are ambitious to rise in the world, but I assure you the way we have risen is far different from our expectations."

"They must be traveling showmen," whispered Chiquita to Camille.

The young woman nodded and tossed Mr. Jigger a five-dollar bill.

"Take that," she said, "and divide it between you."

"Madam," said Jigger, with genuine tears in his sharp eyes, "your kindness overwhelms me. This money will be of immeasurable use to us."

"Cut stick, old man!" suddenly interposed the boy, who, while they conversed, had been gazing down the road uneasily. "Run for it, or we're a goner, for here comes the constable!"

"I bid you adieu, ma'am," said Mr. Jigger hurriedly. "We will meet again."

The young woman started, and her face, if possible, became whiter as Jigger said this, and she recoiled with a troubled look, as if bitten by a serpent.

"Yes," she said involuntarily, with a melancholy intonation, "we will meet again."

Why she said this she did not know, but a fearful foreboding had seized upon her that seemed to bode no good of their next meeting, and she heartily wished she had never seen these two peculiar people, harmless as they appeared.

The man and the boy had sprung over the hedge, and ran rapidly down the dusty road, just as an obese country constable came crashing from behind some trees in pursuit of them. A moment later all that could be seen of them was a cloud of dust disappearing behind a turnpike down the road.

At this juncture Arthur Desmond came out and accosted them.

He was a medium-sized man, with white hair and a white beard, attired in a plain suit of black, and wearing an immaculate white shirt, a standing collar and a black cravat.

"What has occurred, Camille?" he asked.

She told him, and then they heard the breakfast-bell ring, and would have gone in, but they heard a low moan escape Chiquita just then.

"Oh!" cried Camille, in frightened accents. "She is sick!"

"What is the matter, child?" demanded the old gentleman, as he hastily caught the Spanish girl in his arms to prevent her falling. "You are pale—trembling."

"It is nothing," she stammered. "A passing faintness only, I assure you."

"What occasioned it, may I ask?"

"That boy's face impressed me strangely," she murmured confusedly.

"Ah," said Camille, "you, too, have just such a presentiment as I had."

"Presentiment?" echoed the other, staring strangely at her friend.

"Yes, yes," said Camille eagerly.

"No, my friend, no presentiment. His face awakened painful recollections——"

"Pshaw! pshaw!" interrupted Mr. Desmond ridiculingly. "Nonsense! How can you let your mind run on events buried in the past on such a cheerful, bright day as this, Chiquita? Look about you and behold the blossoming trees and bushes, hear the sweet songs of the birds in the green boughs, and scent the subtle perfume of those exquisite flowers that permeates the already fragrant air, and tell me if you can think of the darker side of life with so much to admire and adore about you?"

"You are ever good and kind to me," she murmured emotionally.

"There, there. Now, children, let us go in to breakfast," she said gruffly.

They re-entered by the window, and closed it after them.

When they had gone the dense bushes by the side of the piazza rustled, moved, and an instant later a man cautiously emerged, crept along the hedge, and gaining the other side, out on the road, he arose to his feet.

He was about thirty-five, dark-complexioned, and wore a black mustache.

"At last!" he murmured savagely. "I have found you out!"

And, shaking his clenched fist at the house, he hurried down the road, muttering incoherently a strange jumble of words, among which were the names of Chiquita, Camille and Arthur Desmond.

That afternoon at sundown, as was his wont, the old merchant came downstairs in his riding habit, and ordered his saddle horse. As he stood in the path at the back of the house, waiting for the groom to bring the animal around from the stable, he was joined by Camille.

"I think I will run down as far as the city," he said, "for I feel somewhat nervous, my dear. James Thorn will be here to-night."

"What! He here? This is extraordinary!" she exclaimed, starting.

"Ah! you are surprised, eh? Well, the fact is, he wrote me a letter."

"You speak reluctantly," she said, quickly noticing a slight embarrassment in the old gentleman's manner, and the way he kept his eyes averted from her.

"Didn't I tell you I heard from him?"

"No, sir. Something must have happened!"

"Unfortunately, or fortunately, as it may be, you speak truly."

"Is he ill?"

"No; I know nothing of his being sick."

"What can it be? Is he still employed?"

"Yes; he is yet a detective on the Secret Service force."

"Father," she said, with her eyes filling with tears, "you will be kind to him?"

"I will treat him civilly," said Mr. Desmond sternly. "I owe him no kindness. It was he who arrested my son Ralph on a false charge of forgery. How, then, can I bear anything but malice?"

"Oh, father, he only thought he was doing his duty."

"Granted. But he was relentless, despite of relationship and everything else. His stern disciplinarianism has caused me the only real agony of mind I have ever suffered, for I know my son was innocent, and so do you."

"Have I not proven my belief by remaining with you? He was your son, but he was my husband. Can any tie be more binding—did your love for him exceed mine? No, father. Our trouble is very great indeed."

"Poor Camille, I know how devoutly you loved my boy," said the old man feelingly, "but your agony was no greater than mine."

"Love him?" she cried passionately. "The term is inadequate; I adored, I worshiped him, and am I not the one who suffered the keenest pang? For my father disowned me when I married Ralph—disowned me because of the terrible accusation brought against him."

"It was indeed hard for you, Camille."

"But I bore up under the double affliction," she went on, excitedly, "and I have lived here in the hope of some day meeting him again. Twenty years is a long time to wait for a man to come out of prison, father, but I will wait a lifetime. Had you any suspicion as to who did the crime?"

"It is easy to suspect any one," replied Arthur Desmond, staring straight ahead of him, "but it is hard to affix the crime on the real culprit. Nevertheless, if I were to say that Delano Joslin was the criminal, and be enabled to back up my allegation, I would not be far wrong, I think."

"How became you impressed with that idea?"

"The attending circumstances led me to infer so. Joslin was intimate with Ralph, and I feel sure he was an evil-minded man. He taught him to drink, to gamble, and in short corrupted him in every manner that was viceful. Ralph was exemplary enough until after he married you, one year ago, after which he became, as you know, acquainted with Joslin, and thenceforth you best are aware of how he became addicted to gambling, and lost all of the money I had given him. His fortune gone, deeply in debt, and the craze for gambling upon him, you know the result. You know of his downfall. You know, Camille, how he was taken red-handed in the Bank of R——, with the forged check in his pocket. They said he had uttered it, and he denied it. They told him to confess, but he would confess nothing, saying that he was innocent. Then he was tried, and despite all I could do to prevent it, they sent him to prison. They sent him to prison for twenty years——"

"Oh, father—don't!" cried Camille, in agonized tones.

"And who did this?" demanded the old man, in a terrible fury, "I will repeat the name of that unfeeling wretch—it was James Thorn! Do you know who he is—say? But—pardon me, my dear—I am excited, unreasonable. We will speak of this later."

"But, father, you did not tell me what he wants to see you for?"

"Perhaps it is—but no, he knows nothing of that."

"What? Ah, I see a look of triumph on your face—speak!"

"Listen," said Mr. Desmond, in tones of joy, as he bent nearer to her. "Listen to what I say, and as you love your husband retain it as a secret, for your happiness is at stake. I think, by this time——"

"Speak! You pause; am I not trustworthy?"

"By this time Ralph must be free!"

"Free!" she shrieked, with a sudden burst of happiness.

"Hush, my dear child. Be cautious! I have had agents to bribe his keepers."

"Has he escaped?" she sobbed, almost crazy with joy.

"The plan was to let him escape."

"May Heaven help him!" she murmured, clasping her hands fervently and raising her streaming eyes heavenward.

"Amen to that prayer, my daughter, for he is an innocent man! No, James Thorn did not write what he wanted to see me for, but it may be that he has something important to communicate."

"And Ralph! Ralph! When will he go? What will he do?" she asked feverishly.

"If he escapes, as I hope, he must leave the country. He must go away, and I will furnish him with money, and we can join him when he is safe. For this purpose, and to be prepared at any moment, I have drawn from my bank one hundred thousand dollars, in five-hundred-dollar bills. This money is kept in my safe (up in my sleeping apartment), of which you have a duplicate key. If any accident should befall me, take the money out of the safe, when you received an anonymous note signed by the name of 'Jigger,' and follow a guide, who will lead you to your husband. All this must be done with the utmost circumspection."

"Jigger?" she cried in astonishment, "why, he was here this morning."

"Here? Who? That man?" exclaimed Mr. Desmond excitedly.

"Why, yes. The man whom I told you was with the boy acrobat."

"Ah! Then something has been accomplished, or else they failed!"

"They could not fail—it would be impossible. Heaven is just!"

"Ah, my child, nothing mortal is certain."

At this moment the groom appeared, leading a huge black horse.

"Why, he has got King Charles!" exclaimed the girl.

"I ordered him, Camille."

"Surely, sir, you do not mean to ride that fiery beast. He will kill you."

"Oh, no—I can manage him. Besides, I am so unsettled and nervous that I need some exhilaration. Nothing could satisfy me better than this horse."

"He is only half broken and very unmanagable."

"I know it. Nevertheless, I prefer to ride him."

Mounting on the horse, he stooped over and whispered:

"Keep a sharp lookout for the man with the note, and I will return in the course of a couple of hours, Camille. I can trust you."

"And if he should come?"

"Retire to your room if you do not wish to encounter James Thorn."

She nodded with a troubled look on her face, and giving the horse the rein, the huge black beast tossed its shaggy mane, and with its large eyes gleaming like live coals, and its red nostrils dilated, it sprang away, and was off like the wind.

She remained there watching horse and rider until they disappeared, and as the groom went back to the stable, she turned and retraced her steps to the house. When she had disappeared, a man stepped from behind a small summer-house close by where she had been standing and, plunging in among some bushes, disappeared.

It was the same dark-complexioned man who had been watching them that morning, and he wore a demoniacal look on his face as he again made his escape after listening to all that Arthur Desmond had said to her.

Several hours passed, and darkness began settling down rapidly.

The lights were ignited in the house, the twitter of the birds in the trees ceased, the lowing of cattle in the fields was hushed, nor did any of the day sounds break the twilight stillness of the fowls and animals.

A breeze had sprung up, and night insects began to disturb the quietude, these sounds interspersed with the

mournful hooting of owls, and the soft rustle of the leaves of the trees. Nine o'clock struck, and Camille began to get uneasy at the prolonged absence of Mr. Desmond.

And scarcely had the last reverberation of the clock resounded, when there came a loud knock at the front door, and a servant, answering it, presently came into the parlor, saying to Camille:

"There's a boy who looks like a tramp in the reception-room with a note."

"A note?" answered the young girl quickly. "And his name?"

"He said he was Slinking Sammy, and the note was from Mr. Jigger!"

"Ah! It is from him at last!" cried the young girl, and she ran out of the room trembling with joy.

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## CHAPTER TWO

ENTERING the reception-room, Camille saw the young acrobat sitting near a book-rack, staring up at the picture of a young man hung on the wall. He sat still when she entered, and nodded familiarly to her.

"Yer didn't 'speck ter see me out o' limbo, did yer now?" he chuckled.

"Limbo. You escaped from the constable, then, did you?" she asked.

"You bet!" was the reply. "We give him the slip bully!"

"Have you got a note for me?"

"No."

"But——"

"It's fur Mr. Desmond."

"Well, I am his daughter-in-law, so you may give it to me."

"Sure yer ain't the wrong 'un? Jigger says it's awful 'portant."

"Positive. Hurry! Hurry, boy, I must have it immediately!"

"I guess it's orright," said the shrewd little fellow, and he unbuttoned his shirt front and drew out an envelope, which he handed to her.

She gazed at the superscription, and with a smothered cry of joy she rapturously covered it with kisses, and pressed it to her heart, murmuring:

"It is from him! It is indeed from my poor Ralph."

The next moment she had opened it, and read the following hasty lines:

"MY DEAREST FATHER—Let me thank God that I am once more free! Oh, who can realize the import of the word freedom so well as the poor wretch who has been confined by manacles in a prison, and is liberated nineteen years before his term has expired! Your plan succeeded. Money judiciously employed by your agents consummated my escape. The keeper of the prison aided me, and by his scheme the public was led to suppose I had gained my liberty by the aid of outside confederates. The hue and cry will not be raised, and I will not be pursued; and, furnished with a good disguise, which I donned over my striped suit, I may defy detection. Your agents placed me in care of two strolling vagabonds known as Simon Jigger and Slinking Sammy, paid them to guide me down to your house from my prison by the high-roads and through every available woods, without letting them know I am an escaped convict. I was not discovered, and arrived at the old Red Shield tavern, near Brierly, to-night. Tell my darling wife that I am dying with impatience to see her again, to clasp her in my arms, to tell her that the brightest was made of my darkest hours of distress when I thought of her. At nine o'clock I will leave my place of concealment and steal down to the boat-house on the river. Tell her to meet me there and I will arrange a plan to escape to South America or some other land where she can follow me. If you can accompany her, dear father, come to me. But be cautious lest I am discovered.

"Your broken-hearted son, RALPH."

She read and re-read the letter, devouring every word with searching eyes, and her cheeks burned with happy excitement. Having finished reading it at last, she thrust it in her pocket.

"Where did you get this note?" she asked.

"From der Jigger."

"When and where?"

"The man wot was with us writ it in the tavern arter Jigger an' me got away from the constable, and we went back there."

"Has the man who sent this note gone out?"

"He was in the tavern when I left, five minutes ago."

"And he sent you here?"

"Yes'm."

"Can you describe the man's looks?"

"Certainly. He looks just like that," and the boy pointed at the picture that hung on the wall at which he was staring when she entered.

"It is indeed him!" she murmured.

"Is that all, ma'am?" asked Sammy, rising and putting on his hat.

"Yes—you can go. But wait—take this for your trouble."

"Oh, my!" exclaimed the boy delightedly, as he clutched a ten-dollar bill.

At this moment there sounded a furious ringing at the front door-bell.

"Who can that be?" murmured Camille, in alarm.

The sound of footsteps in the hall followed, the door opened, and Mr. Desmond entered the hall, accompanied by a man, and the front door closed again.

Sammy looked frightened, and Camille opened a window.

"Go out this way," she muttered. "You must not be seen here by the servants."

He sprang to the window, but just as he was gliding out on the veranda, a servant came in hastily, and saw him disappearing.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "there goes a man, Miss Camille!"

"No, no!" replied her mistress confusedly. "You are mistaken, Mary."

"I'm pretty sure I seen one, ma'am."

"You didn't, I say! What do you want?"

"The master is in a fearful way. His horse throwed him, and he wants to see you. He telled me to say it wasn't anything serious."

"I knew he would meet with an accident if he rode King Charles," said Camille despairingly, "but he would persist. Who is with him?"

"John Rackstraw. He helped him home."

"Tell him I will be up in a moment."

"Very well, ma'am," said Mary, withdrawing.

Camille looked at the clock. It was quarter past nine. Already her husband was waiting for her, and she was wild to meet him.

"I must see him first," she muttered. "The suspense is unbearable, and I can easily see father when I come back."

She did not wait long to decide, but stepped out the window through which Sammy had made his exit, and passed down the balcony.

She stood listening a moment, and hearing no noise, she

ran lightly among the trees. As she went on swiftly toward the boat-house in the dense darkness, she suddenly came in contact with a man.

"Oh!" she exclaimed in affright. "Who is that?"

"Faith, it's the same question Oi'm axin' you!" growled a rough voice.

"Patrick Brady!" she ejaculated. "Is that you—my father's groom?"

"It is. An' begob, it's Miss Camille, if I'm not wrong."

"Yes, Patrick. Move aside, please."

"It's a damp night fur ye ter be out, ma'am. Do ye nade me purtection?"

"No."

"Thin at laist take these matches, or, bad luck to ther threes, they'll be a-bumpin' an' a-knockin' ther very brains o' ye, ma'am, in this darkniss."

He lit a match as he said this, and scrutinizing her pale face by the light of the tiny flame, he handed her several lucifers, and walked toward the stable.

She gazed after him a moment in silence, and then pursued her course, throwing away a couple of the matches, and retaining the rest on second consideration.

Reaching the boat-house with no further molestation, she pushed open the door and entered. A dark form glided from an obscure corner.

"Ralph!" she cried thrillingly.

"Oh, my darling wife!"

The next moment they were locked in a fond embrace. A rapid conversation followed, and then she arose.

"I will go and tell father that you are here," she said.

"Would it be unsafe for me to enter the house with you?" he asked.

"Oh, the servants might betray you."

"Very well. I know, to my sorrow, no one can be trusted."

"When I come back, we will arrange everything for your safety," she said.

She went out, and he returned to a dark corner of the boat-house again.

Just as she was about to pass from the shadow of the trees she saw a man crouching behind a water-butt, watching the house. A bright beam of lamp-light came down through an open window in the kitchen, falling upon his face, and with a smothered ejaculation she started back.

"James Thorn!" she muttered. "He suspects something. I must warn Ralph, or he is lost. Oh, my God, was there ever such a relentless and heartless man! He would sacrifice all most dear to him for his duty!"

The silent man looked up as if he had heard her, and with her heart beating so that she feared he could hear its rapid pulsations, she shrank farther back.

He remained listening a moment, then crept away from his place of concealment and glided directly toward her. Terror-stricken, she fled back from one tree to another, and saw him pause, and stepping behind the trunk of a huge oak, he peered out at the house again, and then vented a low, guarded whistle.

Instantly it seemed to the frightened wife a dozen policemen arose from as many unexpected places all around-about, and like a horde of phantoms glided over toward Thorn. Watching them with dilated eyes, she saw him whisper something to them, and they then glided away again, vanishing as mysteriously as they had appeared.

She shuddered, and burst into a cold perspiration.

There was now very little chance for her to regain the house without being seen, and it would be impossible for her husband to go away without money to aid in his flight. How was she to gain ingress to the house without arousing suspicion, to warn Arthur Desmond, and get the money from the safe for Ralph? She did not know. Besides, she feared that if one of the officers chanced to stray near the boat-house, her husband might betray himself, thinking it was her returning. This thought was maddening, and in wild alarm she fled back to the escaped convict, and told him of the terrible danger menacing him.

"What shall I do?" he asked aghast.

"Is it safe at the Red Shield?" she queried, after pondering a moment.

"Quite safe. The landlord can be bribed."

"He did not recognize you?"

"No one knows me in this false beard."

"Oh, yes, the boy Slinking Sammy, who is a quick, shrewd little fellow, noted the resemblance between you and your picture in the house. At any rate, we must run some risk. You must go back to the tavern, and I will bribe the owner to conceal you."

"But how can we get there, Camille?"

"In one of these boats."

"I did not think of that."

"The tavern is half a mile down the road, and near the river. What is safer?"

"True!" he murmured, and after a little trouble they noiselessly launched a light skiff, got in, and he rowed quietly out on the river. It was very dark, fortunately, and they quickly reached the desired point, and made a landing. Securing the boat by the painter to a sapling on shore, they walked up to the tavern, in the rear windows of which shone a number of bright, twinkling lights.

Entering by the rear entrance, they stepped into the back parlor.

A dark-featured man was there upon the point of departing.

"Delano Joslin!" exclaimed Ralph involuntarily.

The man started, and his dark face turned livid.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, bending a dark frown upon the other. "Who are you?"

He was the same dark man who had been prowling about Brierly that day.

Ralph did not answer him. He most bitterly regretted having spoken.

"I know you," said the other at length. "This disguise cannot deceive me. You are Ralph Desmond, and you have escaped from prison."

"Hush!" exclaimed Camille angrily. "Would you betray him?"

"No. I have no cause to."

"Swear you will not reveal his secret. No one knows it," said Camille, and in her excitement she caught him convulsively by his arm.

"I was his friend," said the other coldly, "but such infamy as his parted us. However, I have no call to betray him. You have my oath. And now, good-night."

Without saying another word, he went out.

The landlord entered, an agreement was quickly made, and the fugitive hidden. Taking leave of him, and promising to call the next day, Camille returned to the skiff, and rowed back to the boat-house. It was after eleven o'clock. She breathed a sigh of intense relief, for a weight was off of her mind now that he was safe. She had no fear of the officers now, and boldly re-entered the house. But she saw nothing of them. The servants had all retired, and the doors had been locked, and she had been forced to enter through the same window by which she had made her exit. Crossing the hall to the drawing-room, she entered the spacious apartment, and sitting down to think what next to do, she was suddenly seized with a fit of nervousness, and burst out crying and sobbing. She did not hear the window by which she had entered

open after she got in, nor did she see the dark form of a man glide across the reception-room, cross the hall and disappear up the stairs a few minutes later. The house was shrouded in darkness, for the servants had extinguished all the lights before retiring, thinking that no one was up. At this moment the ormulo clock chimed half-past eleven, and she shivered as she listened to the last echoes of the silvery-toned bell.

Camille felt very miserable. She longed to be with her beloved husband, from whom she had been separated nearly a year, but she dared not for fear of betraying him to the detective who had convicted him, and who was even then shadowing the house with a posse of policemen, probably with knowledge that he had escaped from prison, and intent upon his recapture. She hoped, too, that she could rely upon the word of Delano Joslin; but vague apprehensions assailed her when she thought of the instability and villainous nature of the man on whose honor she depended for Ralph's safety. She grew more alarmed every moment, and soon began to think it was the height of folly to leave Ralph there at the mercy of the wretch to whom she attributed his downfall.

In her increasing terror, she bethought herself of the young man's father, and with the resolve to ask his advice, as well as repair her negligence in not seeing him before, to ascertain the extent of his injuries, she arose, and made her way out in the hall. How still the house was!

It was so dark she could not see her hand before her face.

But she was not at a loss, and quickly found the staircase, up which she ran to the next floor. Arthur Desmond's bedroom was at the end of the hall which ran through the middle of the house, and faced the highroad.

As she approached the door, she heard a slight noise in the room.

There sounded a smothered ejaculation in a hoarse tone of voice:

"Oh! Oh-h! Oh-h-h!"

Then there was a muttered curse, the sound of a struggle, a hoarse crying in choking accents again, the sound of arms beating upon something soft—then a deathly stillness.

Suddenly the door of Mr. Desmond's room was violently thrown open, and a man rushed out into the hall, stuffing several packages under his coat.

The light from a lamp in the room streaked out after him.

"Delano Joslin!" she cried, in smothered tones, starting toward him.

"So!" he cried. "You?"

"Yes," she muttered. "What are you doing in there?"

"Nothing—that is, I—I—"

"Let me go in!" she exclaimed, moving toward the door.

"No!" he said fiercely. "Stand back! He is sick! He had a fit!"

She strove to run past him, but he blockaded the doorway with his body.

"You shall not go in," he persisted ferociously.

"Oh, has there been a crime done here? Your clothing is disordered. Your face is pale. Your hands are scratched. You look frightened."

"Let me get out of here. Stand aside. I will lock the door."

"No, sir! What is that under your coat?"

"Will you do as I say, woman? Go in, if you will, then, curse you!"

He rushed out in the hall, and she entered the room.

A loud shriek burst from her pale lips that rang weirdly through the still house, and she staggered out into the hall again.

"Murder!" she gasped. "He is dead! You have killed him."

"You lie! He had an apoplectic fit; I saw him!"

"No—no! You are his murderer!"

"Prove it. Here. Take this package!" he exclaimed.

Drawing one of the parcels from under his coat, he thrust it into her hand.

The next moment several bedroom doors opened, and the servants emerged.

Seeing people in the hall, the women retreated in affright, reclosing their doors hurriedly, and set up a loud crying for help.

"What is this package?" she demanded faintly.

"Money!" he hissed. "Money! I have robbed him!"

"Camille!" said a voice at this juncture.

"Chiquita!" she cried, seeing the girl coming down the hall.

"Fury!" he exclaimed. "You must protect me."

"Never. You have kill——"

"Hush!" he interposed hoarsely, as he caught her by the arm. "Protect me, I say. Denounce me, and I will hang. But I hold you. If you betray me, I will give the police your husband's hiding-place!"

"Oh, merciful God!" she cried, reeling back.

His eyes glowed and flashed like fire, his breath was short, his voice hoarse.

"I will protect you!" she gasped, with an effort.

"Camille! Who is this man?" said Chiquita, approaching.

He started, pulled his felt hat down over his eyes, and crouched back against the wall.

"He—is—a—friend—of—mine!" gasped the young woman chokingly.

"Was it you who cried out, Camille?"

"Yes. I—became—frightened—at—a—noise—in—papa's—room."

"He may be worse," said Chiquita, glancing askance at Joslin. "I will see."

"No—no!" shrieked Camille. "Do not go in there!"

And she ran toward Chiquita, and caught her convulsively to detain her.

"Why not?" asked the other, in innocent surprise.

Unable to speak, Camille fell back, clutching the balustrades.

Bewildered and alarmed at this strange scene, the Spanish girl rushed into Arthur Desmond's room, and flew to the bedside.

A wild shriek burst from her lips.

Desmond lay across his bed in his night-clothing, with staring eyes.

He was dead.

The safe in the corner stood wide open, some of its contents strewn on the floor.

The terrified girl rushed out in the hall again, and another more piercing cry rang from her very soul as her glance fell upon Joslin's face.

"My husband!" she shrieked frantically.

"Maledictions upon her!" howled Joslin furiously.

She started toward him like a tigress, but had not taken two steps before she reeled blindly, and with a deep groan fell fainting on the floor. Joslin rushed into her bedroom, and made his escape out of a window just as James Thorn with his twelve policemen burst in the front door and rushed upstairs!

*(To be continued)*

# CURRENT NEWS

## OYSTER FARM IN SALT LAKE

Plans have been made to begin the propagation of oysters in Bear River Bay, Salt Lake, Utah, this spring, says Popular Mechanics. Analysis has shown that the percentage of salt in the water is practically the same as in ocean oyster beds.

## DEER KILL IN VERMONT FOR NINE DAYS TOTALED 981 BUCKS

Records of the deer kill show that the average weight of buck was 172 pounds, does not being permitted to be killed. Orange and Lemoille counties led, with bucks weighing 350 pounds each. Essex led all counties in the total kills, 156. In the nine days open season 981 bucks were killed, the venison totaling 168,671 pounds, which should save that much beef, mutton and pork.

## TRAPS BIG PRAIRIE WOLF

John Siple caught one of the largest prairie wolves in a trap on his farm northwest of Ida Grove, La., that has ever been killed in the county. The wolf, after he had been killed, measured exactly 64 inches from the tip of his tail to the point of his nose, and his pelt was one of the finest ever taken from an animal of that kind. Mr. Siple has shot and trapped over fifty wolves during the past five years, but this was the best fur hide that he has taken from a wolf.

## TRENCH WEATHER-VANES

One would not expect to find weather-vanes in the trenches, but there are many to be seen and they are not for ornament. It is highly important to know when the wind shifts and begins to blow from the direction of the enemy, for this is the moment when a gas attack is likely. So the weather-vanes may give a warning that will make it possible to adjust gas masks before the deadly vapor comes, which will be from twenty to forty seconds after it is discharged into the air.

## GERMANS OFF UNITED STATES PAYROLL

The United States Government heretofore has been paying regular salaries to commissioned officers of Germany who have been held as prisoners of war. The German Government, however, has failed to express any appreciation of this, or to reciprocate, and now the pay of these commissioned officers has been cut off. The German officers detained as prisoners in the United States, who will no longer receive their pay envelope, should understand that the attitude of their own government is responsible for this. But whether or not they will understand it is another question.

## WILD RABBIT MEAT

Wartime conservation of beef and pork has enabled a Kansan to develop a rather extraordinary business in the marketing of wild rabbits, both jacks and cottontails. A rabbit-packing plant has been established and is now shipping frozen bunnies by the tens of thousands, says *Popular Mechanics*. A recent contract called for 480,000 pounds of jackrabbit meat. The jacks average four pounds each when dressed. This means that approximately 120,000 rabbits were required to fill the order. The fur is disposed of at a handsome profit. It is used in the manufacture of high-grade felt such as enters into the making of men's hats. All waste products are converted into fertilizer. The industry also rids the country of a crop-destroying pest.

## CLERGYMAN KILLS SNAKE

A tropical snake, 7 feet 6 inches long, which has terrorized housewives in Frederick, Md., for two months, since its escape from a circus, was killed by the Rev. Dr. Gracen D. Kidner, pastor of Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church. The Rev. W. C. Miller, of Mount Airy, was a witness.

After dining at the home of a fellow-minister, the two clergymen took a stroll in a park near by, finding a seat in a pavilion.

The snake appeared soon afterward, writhing along the railing of the structure.

Miller hastened to a neighbor, borrowed a shotgun, and returned to the scene, followed by a crowd. Dr. Kidner, electing to perform the slaughter, fired one shot, killing the reptile instantly.

## THINGS IN SCIENCE

Spectacles having double lenses with air spaces between and with pneumatic rings to make them water tight have been invented by an Englishman to aid divers under water.

For surgeons' use a tourniquet has been invented that is made of a flexible steel band, and the end of the thumb screw that holds it in place pressing firmly over an artery.

Tests made in England of radium as an aid to plant growth have shown that it is most effective when used in the proportion of one seven-hundredth of a gram to a ton of soil.

The opening in the top of a new sugar container opens automatically as it is tilted to pour out its contents and closes as the device is righted to exclude dust and insects.

The industry encouraged by the Government, Tunis is now producing more than 10,000,000 gallons of olive oil a year and expects in a few years to more than double the amount.

A new hot water bottle, which also may be used to hold crushed ice, is made of metal and is so formed as to fit the chest or abdomen closely and be held in place with straps.

To prevent grade crossing accidents to automobilists an inventor has patented a roadway so curved as to oblige a driver to lessen his speed before approaching a railroad track.

### DOG'S FINE COFFIN

High cost of living did not interfere with the plans of Mme. Riti Elandi, an operatic star, when Kiki, her Pomeranian dog, died suddenly in Mount Clemens, Mich. The dog was of aristocratic parentage, coming from the royal kennels of Bulgaria.

The madame engaged the services of a veterinarian as well as of a nurse, who remained on duty constantly.

When notified of the dog's passing, Mme. Elandi broke down with grief. She ordered a special casket of white velvet with silk trimmings and the pet was encased. Thomas Duncan of the hotel wore a band of crape on his arm to help appease the famous singer's grief, and burial was in a rose garden. Mme. Elandi ordered a granite slab to mark the resting-place of her pet. Huge floral pieces sent by guests are resting on the new-made grave. The cost of the funeral was over $75.

### WATER IN ROCKS AND AGE OF PLANETS

A novel idea in estimating the physical condition of planets was put forth by M. Veronnet before the Academie des Sciences at a recent meeting in Paris. He based it upon a calculation of the quantity of water that rocks such as granite and porphyry absorb before becoming perfectly dry.

He said that on the moon all water has been completely absorbed by slow diffusion as the rocks gradually cooled. Venus is still surrounded by a thick layer of vapor, while no water has yet been condensed on the surface of Mercury, this planet being still in a condition in which its geological life has not begun, and consequently no clouds have yet formed on its surface.

M. Veronnet calculates that the rocks of our earth now contain absorbed water which would cover the earth to an average depth of about 400 meters.

### THE FIRST GAS STREET LIGHTS

Gas for street lighting was first used in Pall Mall, London, 111 years ago. A few experimental gas lights had previously been used in Golden Lane, but it was not until a few years later that the new form of illumination was generally adopted in London streets. The first attempt to introduce the use of gas in America was in Baltimore in 1816. The project was unsuccessful. In 1822 it was introduced in Boston, and in the following year New York streets were lighted by gas. The system did not prove successful, however, until 1827. The use of gas spread rapidly to other cities in the United States and Canada. Rosin and oil were used for producing gas in America in the early days of the industry, but later Newcastle coal and the Albert coal of Nova Scotia were employed. Until half a century ago the price per thousand feet ranged up to $7, the average being about $3.50.

### DO ROUND HEADS INSPIRE "FRIGHTFULNESS?"

A study of the shape of the German head would have foretold the merciless, unimpassioned severity with which the people of Belgium and other conquered territory have been treated, according to a scientist who has studied the subject. Mankind is classified by the shape of its skulls and all but 20 per cent. of the subjects of the Kaiser belong to the "home dinaricis," or round head group. It is the theory of Carlo Puini, a distinguished Italian eugenist, that this round, or bullet, head compresses the brain so that its humane and enlightened characteristics cannot develop. Bismarck was an excellent example of the type of the "home dinaricis" head, the face of which is large, the expression being heavy and fierce. The English and Scandinavians are pure "long heads," and a study of the photographs of Arthur Balfour, the British statesman, and Marshal von Hindenburg reveal a truly remarkable difference in countenance and expression.

### TELEPHONE GIRLS TRAINING FOR U. S. SERVICE OVERSEA

Women with a fluent knowledge of French are being trained in San Francisco, New York, Chicago, and other cities, to go to France as telephone operators, is the statement of the Chief Signal Officer of the Signal Corps. They will not be sent over in one unit, but ordered to go in groups from time to time.

The members of this unit will wear a standard uniform which they will be required to furnish. The Signal Corps finds it necessary to lay stress again upon the fact that no wives of officers or enlisted men will be accepted and that applicants must be able to speak both French and English perfectly. Applications from women, preferably between 23 and 35 years of age, who are physically fit and who answer the language requirements, should be sent to the Chief Signal Officer of the Signal Corps, Room 826, Mills Building Annex, Washington, D. C. No information can be given as to the locality in which the telephone girls will be stationed.

### BIG EAR OF CORN

Knox County, widely known for its bumper corn crops and large ears of corn, which have taken many of the prizes offered at the corn shows held in Southern Indiana, has exerted itself since the cry was raised for bigger and better crops, and at last has produced an ear of corn which would take the sweepstakes prize at any of the State fairs.

The ear of corn, which is attracting much attention, is on exhibition in a store window at Bicknell, Ind. It was produced by F. J. Spear, a recognized local corn grower. The ear is thirty-three inches long and seven inches in diameter.

Of course, the ear of corn is camouflage from start to finish, but the maker realizing that the soldiers at the front were in need of the little luxuries that the Red Cross Society was sending them, made the ear of corn and gave it to the local chapter. It will be raffled off, the proceeds going to the Red Cross chapter.

The ear of corn is made from selected seed corn, which is mounted on a pine stick with glue.

### VALUE OF FINGER-PRINTS

A case of aphasia, which emphasized in a striking manner the value of the finger-print system as a means of identification, recently occurred at Washington, says the *New York Medical Journal*. A man in bluejacket's uniform was left at the naval hospital in that city, about nine o'clock one evening, by a lady in a limousine. The only information she could give regarding the man was that she had noticed him in a dazed condition on the street, and, believing him to be in distress, took him into her machine and brought him to the hospital. Med. Insp'r Robert M. Kennedy, U. S. N., commanding the hospital, was unable to obtain any information from the man himself as to his identity or where he belonged. Finally, one of the finger-print experts of the Navy Department was called in, the man's finger-prints were taken, and almost immediately he was identified as to name, station, place of enlistment, etc. It was shown that he enlisted in Michigan last May and disappeared from the naval training station at Great Lakes, Ill., in October. He was unconscious for fourteen hours after arrival at the hospital, and he was under treatment for several weeks without apparently recovering any knowledge as to his identity.

## HOW AFRICA GETS THE WAR NEWS

The war has, from the first, been brought right home to Africa. The four German colonies, over which the war extended, have an area more than four times as great as Germany; and there has been long and hard fighting in all of them except in Togo. Outside and within these areas of actual warfare live thousands of whites who are intensely interested in the European struggle. It may surprise many to know that not a few of these whites, even in the depths of Africa, are receiving the essence of the news every day and are well informed as to the most vital facts of the day's war history, says the *Electrical Experimenter*.

Even the Sahara Desert is now partly belted by a telegraph line, a French enterprise, with wireless extension to Timbuctoo. Thus this once mysterious city of the Sudan is now in touch with the great events of the day. The Belgian Congo is efficiently served by the French cable to Libreville and the land line to Stanley Pool, where navigation of the Upper Congo begins. The news is then wired up the Congo to the mouth of the Kasai River, 370 miles above the mouth of the Congo, and then by wireless to Stanley Falls, 870 miles above the Kasai.

## ONCE A PAGAN FESTIVAL

The observance of St. Valentine's Day as a day sacred to love and tender missives goes back to a period long before the Christian era and the application of the name of the good saint to the festival. Among the ancient Romans the 14th of February was celebrated as the feast of Lupercalia. On that day the young Romans chose their sweethearts for the year. Personal preference did not figure in the choice, which was carried out by means of a lottery. The young men held a meeting and the names of the maidens of the neighborhood were written on slips of parchment.

Each in turn drew a name, and the young lady was supposed to submit to a decree of fate and devote herself exclusively to the man, whether she liked him or not. When paganism was overthrown by Christianity the festival of Lupercalia became St. Valentine's Day, so named in honor of a priest and martyr who was executed on the 14th of February in the year 270. It was only because the day of Valentine's martyrdom fell on the date of the pagan love festival in honor of the goddess of Februata Juno that St. Valentine became the patron of lovers.

Arizona is the "Valentine State." It was admitted to the Union on February 14, 1912, and has celebrated its sixth anniversary.

## SPEEDING UP CROPS BY ELECTRICITY

Driven by the necessity of increasing home production to offset the loss of food-carrying ships by submarines, the English Government is making a thorough test of the possibilities of stimulating plant growth by means of electricity. Overhead wires are to be used and experiments will be made with spring wheat, oats, barley and clover, and also to determine what fertilizers give best results. The tests will be made at Hereford by agricultural experts under the direction of Prof. W. H. Blackman of the Imperial College of Science and Technology.

The equipment suggests a miniature telegraph line, the poles being just high enough to permit a loaded wagon to pass. They cover the fields where the experiments are being made in rows thirty feet apart and are strung with thin wires. Through the wires is sent a high tension, alternating current of tremendous voltage. This is dissipated into the air and is said to act as a substitute for sunshine.

Experiments with overhead wires were begun in England twenty years ago, among those interested being Sir Oliver Lodge and Professor Lemstrom of Helsingfors, an authority on agricultural subjects. They formed a company and sold a large number of installations, but results were not always satisfactory and some lost faith. Electroculture is a science of the future.

## WARNING AGAINST SCHEME TO SWINDLE THE FARMERS

The Federal Farm Loan Board has issued the following:

Another scheme for swindling the farmers of the United States has been discovered by the Federal Farm Loan Board. A man advertising himself as an authorized organizer of national farm loan associations is sending out advertising matter emblazoned with the national flag, stating that he will organize such associations for $500 each, and will teach others the trick for a certain sum of money. His advertisements have reached farmers and business men over a large part of the United States. He claims to be so busy organizing national farm loan associations that he needs help, but will take time to teach others for a monetary consideration.

All such representations are fraudulent. In order to borrow under the farm loan act, it is necessary for farmers to organize cooperative national farm loan associations in their local communities. It is a violation of a ruling of the Federal Farm Loan Board, published more than a year ago, for a national farm loan association or a joint-stock land bank to spend any money for promotion purposes. Associations thus organized will not be chartered by the Federal Farm Loan Board. Farmers are warned therefore against any one asking a fee for his proffered services in connection with applying for a loan under the Federal farm loan act.

## MARKET FOR SHARK SKINS

As a result of the Bureau of Fisheries' policy of furnishing the skins of sharks and other fishes to persons wishing to experiment with these products, more than forty tanners have had an opportunity to give them a trial, and several companies are now in the market for the raw hides of sharks and porpoises.

The bureau has recently revised its circular on the subject of skinning sharks and curing and boxing the skins for shipment, and has added illustrations showing where the cuts should be made in taking off the skin and an outline of a skin properly taken off.

This information, together with the fact that tanners are desirous of obtaining the raw materials, is being communicated to fishermen, and the latter are being urged to furnish the tanners with the supplies of the raw materials.

The names of tanners and the prices they are willing to pay fishermen for various kinds of aquatic skins of different sizes are included in the circular.

There has been a number of interesting developments in the uses to which these leathers may be put, and if these work out as expected, they should materially aid in establishing a regular market for aquatic skins.

Some of the cabinetmakers in this country still use the skins of certain sharks for polishing purposes. It appears that the skins heretofore used are those of one of the European sharks. The bureau is now determining whether the skins of some of the sharks on our own coasts are not equally suited for this purpose.

## A MAD ELEPHANT

A trick elephant was standing in an alley in the rear of a theater, Potterville, Cal., when John Wallace, a boxmaker, came along peeling an orange. The orange was sour, so he passed it on to the elephant. With a snort the elephant promptly wound its trunk about Wallace and hurled him headlong into a pile of packing cases, thirty feet away. Wallace was unconscious when he was dug from the wreckage and two surgeons worked over him for nearly three hours repairing cuts and contusions.

## THE OLDEST BELL IN AMERICA

Anne, Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, was the giver of the first bell in America. This bell was unearthed several years ago underneath a stage in the guild hall of Trinity Church at Newport, R. I. It is three feet high, and an arrow and inscription show it to have been the present of Queen Anne. It bears the date of 1702, which was the year Queen Anne succeeded to the throne, following the death of William. Experts declare that it is undoubtedly the oldest bell in America, or, at least, in the Northern Continent. It is half a century older than Philadelphia's famous "Liberty Bell," which was cast in 1753. This was not the only bell given the Newport church by Queen Anne, but the other was melted many years ago and, with other material, was cast into the large bell which is now in the tower of the church.

Anne was the daughter of James II. While her father and mother joined the Church of Rome, Anne was reared as a Protestant. In her twentieth year she married Prince George, brother of the King of Denmark. Eighteen years later she ascended the throne. Her reign of a dozen years was crowded with events of vast importance for the British Empire and all Europe, and her name is associated with one of the greatest epochs in the history of English literature.

## MOTORING IN BLIZZARD

The experience of several motorists who missed their way and spent a night on the plains in a raging blizzard is related by The Terry County Herald of Texas. As in New York the cold snap late in January developed into the worst felt in the Panhandle section of Northwest Texas for years, and the blizzard of snow, sleet, and sand was the most terrible in the recollection of the oldest cowman.

One of the auto parties consisted of three men, who were viewing some land in the southeast part of the county. The blizzard struck them at ten o'clock in the morning when within ten miles of the county seat. They missed the road and ran into a drift which stopped their car for good, the radiator having frozen.

Believing the blizzard would abate before nightfall, they got into the car, which was of a touring type, covered up as best they could with the one robe, and tried to be comfortable. But the storm increased in fury, and they spent an agonizing night, with the mercury at seven degrees below zero. When day dawned they found they were only half a mile from a ranch house. One of the men had his feet frozen, and later had to have several of his toes amputated.

A physician and his wife, in the same district, were also caught out the same night in their closed car, after the exhaust had become plugged with snow and sand. Two blankets and a foot warmer kept them from freezing.

## SUN WARPLANES' CHIEF FOE IN MESOPOTAMIA

Airplanes are being used in Mesopotamia just as they are in other theaters of war. The British find that the eyes of the army are as much needed to see over the sun-baked desert where they are fighting the Turks as they are in France. The natural conditions in Mesopotamia are very hard on the military airplane.

There is no moisture in that country. The air is very dry. This would be an ideal condition for airplanes if it were not for the intense heat of the sun, explains *Popular Science Monthly*. Long rainy spells make great trouble for aviators in Europe because the moisture causes the wood used in the machines to warp. In Mesopotamia this difficulty does not exist; but the large expanse of horizontal surface offered by the planes absorbs the sun's heat as a sponge absorbs water. The planes become so hot that you could literally cook an egg on them.

While the planes are in flight the coolness of the upper air and the gale that sweeps across the desert keep them comparatively cool. It is when they are at rest on the ground where the temperature is so very high that the damage is done by the sun. The natives of Mesopotamia weave a pliable, fine matting. The British use this matting as a covering for their military airplanes. It not only acts as an ideal protection from the rays of the sun, but makes the planes invisible to the enemy.

## ANTS GATHER HONEY

Bees are usually the only insects associated with honey, but there are other insects which gather honey as carefully and greedily as bees, notably the honey ants of Mexico and Australia. They are as industrious as the bees, but their method of storing honey is unique, says the Pittsburgh *Press*.

While the workers of this species of ants are hard at work keeping the nest in order, tending the young and gathering ordinary food supplies, a few of the ants are reserved as living receptacles for the honey. In the Mexican species the workers gather a sweet secretion which exudes from certain plant-galls, and then hurry home to force this honey down the throats of the living honey-jars. The receivers of the honey are rapidly distended until they look like polished membranous balls, and after the honey has undergone a certain chemical change in these living receivers it is drawn out by the normal workers to feed the young. If one of the living honey-jars meets with an accident, so that the honey runs out, the ordinary workers lap it up to restore it in another uninjured receiver. If, however, a honey-jar ant dies when filled with honey, both ant and contents will be buried together.

Having no hives like bees it is impossible for all-devouring man to rob the honey-ant of its honey, yet a method has been found, especially in Mexico, of gathering the living honey-jars with their honey and utilizing the honey extracted under pressure. The well-filled ants are sold at so much a measure, and when the honey has been squeezed out of their bodies a sweet drink, something like English mead, is made out of it.

There is quite a difference naturally between this ant-honey, which is derived from plant-galls, and the honey made by bees from extracts of flowers, yet the saccharine principle is much the same, all being of vegetable origin, attacked by insect ferments, for the perfecting and developing of the product. It is remarkable that the ants themselves will not touch the honey of one of their kind that has died while filled with it, possibly because they have learned from experience that the honey is soured or made dangerous by the putrefaction of the dead ant. Thus instinct saves ants where intelligence does not always save human beings from eating the flesh of animals which have died from disease.

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